ONE-ACT PLAYS

ANSARI

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SELECTED & EDITED

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PREFACE

The One-Act play is comparatively a new venture in the drama, in as much as it is a modern modification of the full three or five act play. It has consequently to be highly condensed and artistically compact to be a success as well as to fulfil the time-limit imposed upon it.

Technically the plot is the skeleton or the bed-rock of the drama. Around the plot or the chief dramatic situation are hinged the various scenes and acts, clothing and fleshing out the idea contained in the plot proper. The playwright of the one-act play must concentrate primarily on his plot, because that is his main sphere. The plot, however, must be distinguished from the theme or idea of a play. The plot is the event or happening, the physical situation through the occurrence of which the dramatist's idea or theme reveals itself. To take a few examples from our collection. In *The Distant Drum*, the actual blowing of the Drum of Sarne and the consequent discomfiture of Olive and Kenley is the situation through which the

playwright conveys his idea of the irony operating in human planning which can unexpectedly and powerfully turn aside all our most cherished and confident of plans. In *The Tree*, the sudden and thoughtless departure of Leopold leads to two deaths. That is the basic situation, revealing the idea of the loss of good human lives through an apparantly inconsequential action, which is used by a selfish person Vera to satisfy her own vanity.

The plot of the One-Act play is the writer's chief point of interest towards which he must ever bend all his technical and imaginative resources. The exposition or introduction of a play is its opening in which the playwright introduces his audience through facts and suggestions to the main situation. It is a preparation for the type of play and the atmosphere we are going to be introduced to. The exposition in a One-Act play must be as brief and as direct as possible. It cannot afford to be dilatory and digressive, and must lead pointedly on to the middle of the play on the main situation. The exposition in *They Cannot Be Forgotten* is the opening conversation between the Doorman and the Girl, in which we learn that the Girl is a poor devotee of the theatre, and that this is not the first time that she has been begging for admittance to see the

Producer. In *And So To War*, the exposition is the briefest in all our collection of plays. The announcer is in the act of broadcasting the main situation of the play, *i.e.*, that Disneyana has declared war on Lilliput.

The end or *denouement* of the One-Act play must be directly appropriate to the central dramatic situation. It must truthfully represent the changed circumstances and relations of those who took part in the action of the play, after the occurrence of the crucial happening. A big change comes about in the attitude and the hopes of the Slater and Jordan families after Grandfather Abel Merryweather has suddenly come to life and announced his forthcoming marriage. In a *Villa For Sale*, the young wife Jeanne has to learn the heavy truth that, her husband can be quite nonchalantly callous about her pet feelings when it comes to a question of his making a pretty penny.

The closing situation in a One-Act play does not as in the three or five act play represent a complete and permanent change in the lives of its protagonists. The change that occurs is an important one, but the impression given is that it is only *one* of the many important changes that come about in the life of man. It's impression is not of a final sealing of life's activities as in a Greek or Shakespearean tragedy.

It has been correctly said that a dramatist, particularly the dramatist of the One-Act form must know the end of his play before he fashions its beginning. He must know where he is going before he knows which road to take. The seeds of the close must be suggested in the exposition, so as to give an impression of reality and a logical causation of events, and changes of character.

The One-Act form is thus a highly conscious art form. There has to be no excess of speech and action. Every single word must be precise and every single sentence must lead directly to the climacteric and the close of the play.

In the end our thanks are due and are hereby tendered to various publishers who have permitted us to use copyright pieces included in this selection.

THE TREE

by

SYDNEY BOX

CHARACTERS

VERA
ANNA
LEOPOLD
ERNEST
THE GARDENER

THE TREE

SCENE: *The garden of* VERA'S *house.*

In the middle of the stage is a tree; beneath the tree a garden seat.

It is spring. VERA *and* ANNA *are sitting together on the seat.* VERA *is reading a book.* ANNA *is leaning idly back looking idly up through the branches of the tree.*

For a moment after the curtain rises they are quite motionless. Then VERA *looks up from her book.*

VERA: It is warm to-day. The sun is shining. We can sit in the garden underneath the tree for the first time this year. The apple-trees are in blossom, and there are primroses in the long meadow. It is spring and everybody says one should be happy in the spring. Yet I am miserable.

ANNA: They say that only because they project themselves into the future and imagine that it is already summer. It is very foolish really. I remember how Uncle Theodore insisted on going out without his woollen underpants on just such a day as this. Presently the sun went in; he caught pneumonia; and in a week he was dead. He left me this brooch in his will. Mother was very sad. But when the next spring came round she gathered primroses in the long meadow and laughed. When Father reproached her she said: "How can I help being happy? It is the spring."

VERA: I shall never be happy as long as I am shut up eternally in this garden with its one tree reminding me all the time of you. That you share this tree with me Vera is selfish.

ANNA: It is not my fault that there is only one tree in the garden.

VERA: Of course it is not your fault. It is something we can neither of us help. But oh, I am so weary of it. If only I could get away from it—then I should be happy again.

ANNA: You will get away. You are the kind to get what you want in the end.

VERA: It has always been the same, ever since I can remember. Just because I had the misfortune to be born a twin I have to share with you every feeling, every emotion, every experience. We must dress alike. We must go everywhere together. Because we are twins we must never be parted.

ANNA: It is true that we never have been parted, but there is no reason why it should always be so.

VERA: That is what I tell myself. There is no reason why it should always be so. But it always is so. Every spring I say: "One day there will come the opportunity to get away from all this." But when the opportunity comes I cannot take it because that would mean hurting you—and I cannot bring myself to hurt you because you are part of me. Oh, it isn't fair! It isn't fair!

[*The* GARDENER *enters, carrying a basket.*]

GARDENER: Parson says he heard the cuckoo in the beeches this morning. "That means that spring is really here," says he.

VERA: Because there are two of us you might suppose that our lives would be full—that our experiences would be doubled. But instead of our lives being doubled, they are halved.

GARDENER: I can't say, miss. In the beeches, parson said.

VERA (*turning away*): Oh, it is intolerable!

ANNA: He can't help it. He is old and deaf, but he means well.

VERA (*taking up the book again and reading*): "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts" (*She shuts the book suddenly and rises.*) I could be a great actress if only I could go to the town and study, and live in decent surroundings, among people who would appreciate my talent.

GARDENER: Quite so, miss. So parson says: "I must go and write to the newspapers about it," says he. Ha! That's a good one, that is. (*He goes off chuckling to himself.*)

ANNA: It is strange that you should be so full of ambition, while I have no desire at all to go to the town. I like it here. I like the freedom of it.

VERA: Freedom! Is it freedom to be imprisoned in this garden with its one tree?

ANNA: There are other trees in the orchard.

VERA: You know very well they do not belong to us.

ANNA: But we can look at them whenever we wish to.

VERA: It is not the same. Sometimes I think you have no ambition beyond marrying and settling down and having a baby—two babies—three babies—so that they can all play under this one tree. You might as well be a peasant.

ANNA: I think sometimes that it is not a bad thing to be a peasant. If a peasant has her man and her children and enough to eat she fulfils herself and she is happy. At least she is not made continually miserable by unsatisfied longing for something more.

[*The* GARDENER *comes in again. He wipes his hands*

carefully on his trousers, takes off his hat and from it produces a visiting card which he hands to VERA.]

GARDENER: There was two young gentlemen down by the gate. One of them gave me this.

VERA (*taking the card*): I will fetch them myself. This place is intolerable. We live like savages.

GARDENER: I didn't rightly understand what they said.

VERA: When they are here, Anna, I hope you will try to look as though you were glad to see them. (*She goes.*)

GARDENER: So parson says: "I must go and write to the newspapers about it," says he. So I says: "Ah! but 'tain't everyone as reads the newspapers," says I "But old cuckoo—you've got to listen to him whether you want to or not," says I. Ha! That's a good one, that is.

[*He goes, chuckling.* VERA *enters, followed by* LEOPOLD *and* ERNEST.]

VERA: This is my sister. Anna, this is Leopold. And this is Ernest, Leopold's secretary.

LEOPOLD: My *companion*. A man whose mind is tidy doesn't need a secretary.

ERNEST: A man whose mind is at rest doesn't need a companion.

LEOPOLD: Must you insult me? (*To* ANNA) You know I only took him on to oblige Vera. I don't need him at all really.

VERA: Don't start again, please! I found them at the gate arguing at the tops of their voices and not attempting to come in.

LEOPOLD: But it was a matter of principle, and we business men have to be so careful of principle.

ERNEST: You've got the principal. It is only the interest you have to worry about. (*To* VERA) You

know, all the time I make foolish little satirical remarks like that, when, if only I had the courage of my convictions I should be attempting to throttle him.

LEOPOLD (*to* ANNA): Ernest was complaining about some little business transaction—a small thing of no importance. I will not bore you with it. The important thing is that he attacked my principles—said they were unethical. Now I ask you to judge—what can he know about the ethics of business?

VERA: He knows nothing, of couruse. If he understood them, he would be a successful man like you, instead of your secretary.

LEOPOLD: *Companion.* (*To* ANNA) My creed is very simple. I am a man whose business it is to buy and sell. Whether it is Bibles or bullets does not matter a rap to me. My business is to buy for the lowest price at which people will sell—and sell for the highest price at which people will buy. Morals don't enter into it. What people do with the money when I have bought their goods—or the goods when I have sold them is their own affair. I am merely the intermediary.

ERNEST: And he is such a successful intermediary that he must be right—if morals don't enter into it.

[*Enter the* GARDENER.]

GARDENER: The cuckoo sings louder than any of the other birds—and yet he is the only one that does not build a nest.

VERA (*laughing*): Oh, Benjamin is so funny. He is deaf, you know. He never hears anything we say to him. If we ask him to plant geraniums for us, we see when they come up that they are cabbages. Do you know, sometimes there is a blaze of flowers in

the kitchen garden and nothing but vegetables here.

[*The* GARDENER *goes.*]

LEOPOLD: You should get rid of him.

VERA: Oh, we have tried to, but he never hears what we say, so it's no use. Next day he is here again, just the same. But why are we talking about him? It is the spring. There is blossom on the trees in the orchard and the birds are singing. All nature is in a happy mood. Don't you feel it?

LEOPOLD: I never allow nature to upset my equilibrium.

VERA: Oh, but you should! I insist that you should! Come along! We will run to the top of the hill and then, when I have recovered my breath I will read to you—the scene from *Othello*, where——

LEOPOLD: But the *top* of the hill!

VERA: No less! Come along!

[*She takes* LEOPOLD'S *hand and runs off, laughing, pulling him behind her.*]

ERNEST (*watching her admiringly*): What ~~uerve~~ nerve! What energy! She has it just as much as he—the power to override every objection, to shout down everyone who disagrees with her. I admire them so much. All the time I am with them I am thinking that they are immoral and ruthless and selfish. But at least they have the power to bring about what they want—they are the successful ones. While I go on making satirical remarks about them instead of *doing* something myself. It's terrible! It's all so entirely futile! I'm ashamed of myself.

ANNA: No one has any right to be sad in the spring.

ERNEST: And in such a beautiful garden, too, with its lovely tree.

ANNA: There you are, you see. None of us can know what life is like for others. To you this tree is a thing of beauty; to my sister and me it is a constant torture. (*She pauses*). My sister and I are twins. When we were born, our parents planted two trees, one for each of us. While they were still tiny shoots, so tiny that nobody knew which was which, one of the trees died. Only the one you see now was left.

ERNEST: Then you must share it between you.

ANNA: We do. But my sister complaints that she has to share everything with me. And we both of us think secretly that the tree which has lived is ours and that it was the other's which died.

[*The* GARDENER *comes in and begins weeding a border down-stage, close to the footlights.*]

ERNEST: I have heard that if one sits under a tree, silently, without making a sound, one can hear it speak. If we sat under this one perhaps he would tell us whose he really is.

ANNA: I don't think my sister, or your Leopold would believe us if he did.

ERNEST: Ssh! Listen!

[*There is a pause. Then* ANNA *unconsciously hums the opening bars of a tune.* ERNEST, *without thinking, continues with the next few bars. They turn and look at one another. They laugh. Then* ERNEST *kisses her.* ANNA *jumps to her feet and runs off, laughing.* ERNEST *follows her. The* GARDENER *begins to speak, half over his shoulder, as though he thinks they are still there. In a moment, the curtains close leaving the* GARDENER *outside, between them and the audience. He goes on talking, gradually moving along the border until, as*

the curtains open again, he is disappearing at the other side of the stage.]

GARDENER: "March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers." That's what parson says to me when I was coming down the lane this morning. "Yes," says I, "and something else besides flowers—weeds, drat 'em." "Ah," says he, "but you can't have a garden without weeds." "I don't see why not," says I. "It's the penalty of Adam," says he. "When man was turned out of the garden, he was turned out because he sinned. And it was because he sinned that the first weeds came," says he. So I says, "Ah, but I don't see why I should be bothered with weeds just because *Adam* sinned," says I. "Now the old master," says I, "he sinned a bit in his time and *he* was never bothered with weeds," says I. "And for why? Because I had to pull 'em up quick before he saw them, if I didn't want to lose my job—that's why," says I. Ha! That's good one, that is!

[*He goes off, chuckling. The curtain rises again on the garden. It is summer.* VERA *and* LEOPOLD *are seated under the tree,* VERA *on the seat and* LEOPOLD *in a chair a few yards away.* VERA *is reading from a book.* LEOPOLD *is dozing. It is evening and from the house comes the sound of a pianoforte, on which is being played the tune hummed by* ERNEST *and* ANNA *at the end of the previous scene.*]

VERA (*reading*):

"Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush be paint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke: but farewell compliment!

Dost thou love me ? I know thou wilt say 'Ay' ;
And I will take thy word ; yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false : at lovers' perjuries,
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully :
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo ; but else, not for the world.

LEOPOLD : If I buy goods made in a large factory, it is almost certain that some of those goods will be bought again by the people employed in that factory —that is, by the people who made them. But before they are sold back to the people who made them I have to transport them to my warehouses, store them there, and transport them back again to the purchasers. Now if I could sell them at once to the people who made them, without transporting them, or storing them, my profit would be immeasurably greater.

VERA (*reading*) :

"I have no joy of this contract to-night :
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden ;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens'. Sweet, good night !
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night ! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast !"

[LEOPOLD *snores*.]

VERA : Oh, this is intolerable ! (*She closes the book*.)

LEOPOLD (*walking up and clapping*) : Bravo ! Bravo !

VERA : You know perfectly well that you never heard a word of it.

LEOPOLD : Now don't be angry with me ! It is

very hot and my mind is full of problems. Ever since dinner I have been grappling with a problem which most other men would have given up in despair long ago. It is because I don't give up problems so easily that I am a successful man.

VERA: But I was reading *Romeo and Juliet.*

LEOPOLD: Even if you had been reading my bank book I might still have dozed off. Phwew! How hot it is! (*Testily*). I never can understand why people should imagine that their acting or playing is so much more important than my business. If I go to sleep during a play or a concert, people call me a bore and a cad. But if an actor or a musician yawns during an interesting discussion on business, he is excused because people say he has an artistic temperament. Well, I have a businees temperament.

VERA: And your business temperament prevents you from showing your regard for me.

LEOPOLD: My regard for you has nothing to do with it. I have asked you to marry me. I have given you proof of my affection that—ring—that brooch. Could Ernest have done so much? He would sit and listen to you reading for hours without falling asleep, no doubt, but when you had finished, could he afford so much as a penny to put in your that, as though you were a beggar in the gutter? Now, I'm a business man. I know your value in hard cash—and that value is more than he can afford to pay.

VERA: Is that the only way you think of me?

LEOPOLD: What other way is there? To me you represent so many pounds, shillings and pence of my fortune. What I have to consider is whether you represent good value for that amount. I have

considered that and I have decided that you do. So I have asked you to marry me.

VERA: But don't you see I may be worth much more than you think? I have a talent—I know I have...Listen! Anna has stopped playing. Come into the long meadow and let me explain.

LEOPOLD: All rignt! All right! But I warn you it's no use!

[*They go. In a moment* ANNA *and* ERNEST *enter.* ERNEST *is humming the same tune.*]

ANNA: Vera! Vera! They are not here.

ERNEST: So much the better!

ANNA: I remember when we first sat underneath this tree together. I had on a green dress. It was spring and there was blossom on the trees in the orchard. I was humming that same tune like this—(*she hums*)—pom-pom-pom and you joined in like this—pom-pom-pom (*they laugh*). You were very shy and unsure of yourself. Yet now you seem entirely self-possessed. Why is that?

ERNEST: Because I love you.

ANNA: I love you, too. But that doesn't make me so sure of myself. Sometimes I feel that you don't exist at all—that you are just a creature of my desire.

ERNEST: Sometimes I feel that I am just a creature of Leopold's. But not to-night. Tonight I know that you and I together can accomplish more than Leopold and Vera with all their energy and success. Up till now I have just made satirical remarks and my life has been futile. Now I know that one lives only when one begins to *do* things.

ANNA: I know. But we can do so little.

ERNEST: I remember the first time we met, too. It was underneath this tree and we sat down quietly

to listen to what the tree was saying. It spoke to me—and it speaks to me again now. Listen! I am the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Whatsoever things are good and right and just, think on them.

ANNA: Did the tree say that?

ERNEST: I heard it distinctly. And that's the point. You and I know what is good and right and just. It's our duty to help the rest of the world to know, too. Leopold and Vera mustn't have things all their own way.

[*The* GARDENER *comes in with a watering-can and begins to water the border down-stage by the footlights.*]

ANNA: But what can we do—just the two of us? We are so few and they are so many.

ERNEST: To-day there are just the two of us. But to-morrow there will be four—or six. And in time the majority of the world will think as we do instead of just three or four.

ANNA: It seems too good to be true.

ERNEST: All things are possible—on a summer's night.

[*The curtains close, leaving the* GARDENER *outside them. He goes on watering the border, talking all the time as he does so.*]

GARDENER: Thirsty, were you? Ah! Thirsty weather, that's what it is! I just met parson coming down the lane. "Thirsty weather," says he. "If it goes on much longer like this," says he, "we shall have to go to the good Lord and pray for rain," says he. "Ah!" says I. "And before the year's out," says I, "we'll be going to the good Lord and praying Him to deliver us from floods and tempests," says I. "True, true," says he. "Too

much of anything is apt to be bad for us," says he. "Ah," says I. "Even too much of a sermon on a Sunday morning in August," says I. "And if too much of anything is bad," says I, "then I can't see why the good Lord can't give us a bit more hot weather in the winter—and save us a drop of rain for summer days like this'n," says I. "It'd save me a plaguey lot of trouble," says I, "especially if He could send it after ten o'clock when I'm in bed and asleep," says I......Ha! That's good one, that is! (*He goes off chuckling.*)

[*When the curtain rises again, it is autumn.* VERA *is standing under the tree, reading a note.* ERNEST *is standing watching her. For a moment they are motionless. Then* VERA *turns furiously on* ERNEST.]

VERA: He had no right to go off and leave me like this—without warning, without even coming to say good-bye.

ERNEST: But he sent you a letter.

VERA: A letter! A few platitudes scribbled as he packed his bag.

ERNEST: It was all he had time for.

VERA: I have never been so humiliated in my life. I believed in him. I gave myself to him utterly—freely—gladly. And now he deserts me like this—without a word.

ERNEST: But it was vital that he went at once. The message from town left no doubt about that. His entire fortune is at stake.

VERA: He could at least have come to say goodbye.

ERNEST: There was no time.

VERA: He could have taken me with him.

ERNEST: That would have been impossible. In emergencies like this he has no time even for me.

He is wrapped up in himself. He is entirely self-sufficient—that is the secret of his success.

VERA: We are all self-sufficient—you, I, Anna.

ERNEST: No, that isn't true. You, perhaps, and Leopold, but not Anna—nor I.

VERA: Anna is self-sufficient and you must learn to be.

ERNEST: I don't understand.

VERA: I am glad in a way that Leopold has gone. It makes it easier for me to tell you.

ERNEST: Tell me what ?

VERA: That Anna cannot see you again.

ERNEST: Can't see me again ! Did Anna say that ?

VERA: She asked me to tell you. She would have preferred to have told you herself, but she was afraid her courage would fail her. She could never bear to hurt anyone. Believe me, I am sorry. I like you and I think it would have been a good match. But Anna is strange.

ERNEST: She couldn't bear to hurt anyone.

VERA: Many times I have found her sitting under this tree. She used to say: "If I listen—very quietly—I can hear what the tree is saying." And yesterday, she came to me, weeping, and said: "The tree has said I must give him up."

ERNEST: The tree !

VERA: Of course I tried to make her see reason, but she wouldn't listeo. Her whole life has been bound up in that tree. And to-day she sent me to tell you.

ERNEST: The tree ! She said the tree told her !.

VERA: Believe me, I sympathise with you. I have a great sorrow myself.

ERNEST: Excuse me.

VERA: Go now—please!

ERNEST: Tell her......No, it doesn't matter.

[*He goes.* VERA *tears the note across and throws it on the growd. In a moment there comes the sound of* ANNA's *voice, calling. She runs in.*]

ANNA: Ernest! Ernest! (*She pauses on seeing* ? VERA *alone.*) Oh, I thought I heard Ernest's voice.

VERA: Ernest has gone. They have both gone.

ANNA: Gone! What do you mean?

VERA: There was business to do in the town. So they left.

ANNA: Ernest wouldn't go without seeing me—without saying a word.

VERA: He asked me to tell you. He said he would rather have told you himself, but he was afraid his courage would fail him. He couldn't bear to hurt anyone.

ANNA: He couldn't bear to hurt anyone.

VERA: Leopold did'nt mind hurting me. He just sent me a note—a few platitudes on paper.

ANNA: I can't believe it!

VERA: He said it was the tree!

ANNA: The tree! The tree!

VERA: It was strange. He said: "If you sit very quietly under the tree and listen, you can hear what it is saying. And to-day the tree said I must give her up and go to the town with Leopold."

ANNA: He said the tree told him!

VERA: Believe me I sympathise with you, Anna I have a great sorrow, too. But we must try not to mind too much.

[*She goes.* ANNA *stands quite motionless. In a*

moment the GARDENER *enters. He is sweeping up the fallen leaves. As he passes her,* ANNA *turns to him.*]

ANNA: Benjamin, I want a rope.

GARDENER: Eh?

ANNA: A rope! (*Pause.*) A ROPE!

GARDENER: There'd be one in the potting shed I shouldn't wonder. I'll go and look, missy.

ANNA: No. I'll find it. (*He apparently does not hear.*) I say, I'll find it.

[*She turns and looks up at the tree; then backs out slowly.*]

GARDENER; No, Miss Anna, I can't tell the time but—I know what month it is, for all parson says. (*He goes on sweeping up the leaves, coming down-stage, still talking. The curtains close behind him*). He was down at my cottage this morning, parson was. "I'll give you a calendar to hang on your wall," says he. "Then you can cross off one figure every morning and you'll always know what day it is," says he. "But I know already," says I. "Not for certain, you don't," says he. "I know well enough for me," says I. "If the tree's just shooting little green buds, that means it's April," says I, "and if the leaves are dropping that means it's September." "But it isn't—it's October," says he. "May be," says I, "but the leaves are falling and I'm getting plaguey backache sweeping 'em up—and that shows your calendar's no good to me," says I. Ha! That's a good one, that is!

[*He goes. The curtains open again. It is winter.* VERA *is standing under the naked tree. She is dressed in deep black and carries a sheaf of white flowers. Beside her is* LEOPOLD, *also in black.*

They are motionless. After a moment VERA *speaks.*]

VERA: It is very cold. This morning it was snowing and even now I can feel the wind like ice against my cheeks. But it is colder here.

[*She touches her breast. A distant bell begins to toll and continues intermittently throughout the scene.*]

LEOPOLD: To-morrow we will go away. We will go to the South, where it is warm. In the sunshine you will forget all about this.

VERA: I can never go away now. I killed Anna and in killing her I killed my happiness. This that is left of me is like a house without a key. Anna was the key —and she is gone. I killed her.

LEOPOLD: But that is absurd. You didn't kill Anna.

VERA: I killed Anna—just as you killed Ernest.

LEOPOLD: I killed Ernest? He took his own life, just as she did!

VERA: You killed Ernest when you went away like that —and I killed Anna. I thought that by killing her I should set myself free. And instead I have bound myself for ever to the tree. Now I shall never leave it. I might as well be dead, too.

LEOPOLD: I can never understand why people make so much fuss about death. They will tell you that they believe in a happy life hereafter. They will even tell you that this life is only as an hour compared with eternity. But just mention death and they will talk in whispers and look back over their shoulders as they hurry home.

VERA: It is not the dead who fear death. It is we who are left behind to a living death.

LEOPOLD: I do not fear death.

VERA: No. You will go. But I shall be left alone—

alone with the tree. All our lives have been bound up in that tree. We used to quarrel about it. Anna said it was hers ; I said it was mine. Now I know that she and I were one, that there was only one tree. But I can never possess it now, because I have lost her. Instead, the tree will possess me......As spring changed to summer and autumn to winter the tree changed—and our lives changed too. Now Anna has gone and I am left alone—alone with the tree. Presently spring will come again and the tree will blossom again and fulfil itself in somebody else. But you and I will be dead.

CURTAIN

THEY CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

by

ALEX ATKINSON

CHARACTERS

A GIRL
THE DOORMAN
MACBETH
MARC ANTONY'S VOICE
ROMEO'S VOICE
LEAR'S VOICE
WITCH'S VOICE
A VOICE
VOICES
THE ACTRESS
THE PRODUCER
THE ACTOR
ELECTRICIAN'S VOICE

THEY CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

SCENE: *The Stage.*

The curtain rises on a stage empty both of people and of scenery. The lighting is dim, so that the background is shadowy, a place of dusty shapes where nothing can definitely be made out.

Presently from out of the silence at the back there comes softly a GIRL, *simply dressed, wearing a hat and coat. She moves to a point near the Centre, and stands with her hands in front of her, looking up and around over her head. The* DOORMAN'S VOICE *is heard from the back, gruff and matter-of-fact.*

DOORMAN'S VOICE: There isn't no one here yet, miss.

[*He emerges from the shadows and stands upstage, dimly seen. The* GIRL *speaks with a strange intensity—lovingly—almost child-like.*]

GIRL: How quiet—how quiet it is!

DOORMAN (*grumblingly*): I won't half cop it if anyone sees you, miss.

GIRL (*not heeding him; with quiet ecstasy*): How quiet...

DOORMAN: That's all very well. (*She turns to look at him.*) (*Shrugging*) Oh, it's quiet enough. It's quiete nough. Sometimes when there's no one about—it frightens you, a bit.

GIRL (*smiling as she looks up into the flies*): No, Doorman, you mustn't think that. It can't—it can't frighten you.

DOORMAN: Oh, but it *do.*

GIRL: You don't really mean that, Doorman. When the stage is left alone with its silence...waiting...it seems to be sad. That's what you mean, isn't it?

DOORMAN: That's it, I suppose, miss. (*He moves down towards her.*) But I do know this much: you better not stay here much longer or you'll be seen, and I'll be found out for letting you in, and *then* there'll be a nice fuss, and you know it. It isn't everybody I'd be letting in on to the stage like this, but there's such a thing as taking advantage of good nature, and that won't do, miss.

[*He moves up-stage again as she speaks.*]

GIRL: It *is* sad, to see it empty, all this big stage. Stripped of its old and numberless appearances, left empty and unpeopled. The feet that have so often wakened echoes from its boards have moved into the limbo that we call the world, and for a time it must wait with its cathedral silence. It can wait, Doorman—has it not waited many times before, will it not wait again?

DOORMAN: Not for long, miss. Won't be like this for long. Fine and bright it looks at rehearsals. Plenty of noise then, miss. Not so lonely then.

GIRL (*going up-stage to him a few paces*): Let me stay here for a little while, Doorman. Go back to your dreamy evening-paper doze, your old pipe and your comfortable seat. Your place is at the door. (*Advancing to push him.*) Go—let me stay.

DOORMAN: All very well for you to talk like that, miss. But there's more to it than that, you know as well as I do. What's going to happen when the producer comes in and starts asking questions? What am I to say

then, miss? Where will I stand? My authority's not for asking people in to look around—it's for keeping them out. You can't treat theatres the same as a museum, miss. I've got my job to think of, ain't I, now?

GIRL: What difference can it make, suppose I stay? One more or less among so many in the hurried congregation of rehearsal? Besides, I will not stay so long; I do not wish to see them or to hear them. I am content to stand in this great dusty other world, and take a part in its old mystery. Go, Doorman—let me stay!

DOORMAN: I can't do that, miss.

GIRL: Can you feel nothing of my mood, that you're so grim and humourless? Oh, what an unrelenting guardian you make for this old stage! Six buttons on your uniform—what place have officials in the theatre? Back to your pipe, old man, your time-chained mumbling, watching at the gate above your spectacles! Back from these scented shadows, from the smell of paint—out to your little window and your bleak authority! Forbidding Cyclops grumbling at the gates!—"Put out that cigarette"—"You can't come in"—"If you will leave your name I'll say you called"—"He's not to be disturbed, he's got it on his door"—"I suppose you've an appointment with him, miss?"

DOORMAN: That's just the point—you haven't. And you know what he said the last time.

GIRL: Yes, Doorman, I know. And the time before that—I know it all.

DOORMAN: You can't do nothing, miss, by staying here. You'll only get him wild, that's all you'll do. (*Taking her hand.*) Come on and let's get out of this—it's nearly time.

GIRL: No! (*She snatches her hand away and pulls off her hat, throwing it down and shaking her hair.*) I'm here! I belong here! You can't take me away!

DOORMAN (*Shaking his head unhappily*): You don't belong here, that's the trouble.

GIRL (*lifting her head and commanding silence with a gesture*: Listen!

[*She holds out her fingers. There is no sound.*]

DOORMAN: There's nothing, miss. I can't hear anything.

GIRL: No. Nothing. (*Moving softly back to the Centre, reverently.*) Only the quietness. Can't you hear that? If you are very still, doesn't the silence sink right down inside you, until you cease to be what you are, until you become a part of it, not alive, not an object...farther, farther than that...until you are so close to its grave mystery you dare not breathe unless you break the spell? You will hear something, Doorman, if you will listen.

DOORMAN (*with plaintive doggedness*): I can't hear nothing.

GIRL (*moving to the front of the stage*): Sometimes if you come here and stand by yourself and look out over the empty seats, over the wide curve of the roof, and everything is quiet—have you ever done that?—*then* there are things to hear. (*She pauses, listening.*) Voices, Doorman...Have you ever done that?

DOORMAN: I can't say I have, miss. I don't get much time to stand about.

GIRL: No. There is so little time for anything. Everything slips past and is gone in the flick of an eyelid, before you can grasp it. You must stop, sometimes, pause and take hold of some little moment before it joins

the others and fades. Then you might learn something. Search out the meaning of one little bit of time before it is gone—that is all we can do......Listen, Doorman. Can't you hear ?

[*Again she pauses in absolute silence.*]

DOORMAN : I can't hear nothing, miss. The wind, perhaps. Sometimes it comes right in here and blows the curtains about, when the theatre's empty. Only that, and the echo of your voice. There's nothing else.

GIRL (*walking slowly to the Left, then to the Right*) : How strange it is, this big stage. Did I say it was empty ? It isn't empty at all, Doorman. (*She stands quite still.*) It is filled with voices, old voices, and music, and the sound of feet walking across the boards. Listen ......(*Pointing.*) Macbeth stood there, with blood fresh on his hands from the death-chamber. Can't you see him ? Can't you hear him, Doorman ? His eyes are wide with the horror of it. His hands are at his sides. He is looking back, afraid. All the audience is very still, waiting. Perhaps it is Garrick, or Irving. They linger still on every stage, Doorman, they are always there......Why are there no lights ? No. lights ! A faint spotlight on Macbeth, with the blood on his fingers shining.

[*The lights fade, until the* GIRL *is left in the centre, picked out from the surrounding darkness by a pale spot. She stands listening, eyes closed.*]

MACBETH'S VOICE (*from the darkness at the Right of the stage*): I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise ?

GIRL (*not opening her eyes ; standing quite still and speaking the lines with the utmost feeling*) : I heard

the owl scream and the crickets cry. Did you not speak ?

MACBETH'S VOICE : When ?

GIRL : Now.

MACBETH'S VOICE : As I descended ?

GIRL : Ay.

MACBETH'S VOICE : Hark ! Who lies in the second chamber ?

GIRL : Donalbain. Prince

MACBETH'S VOICE : This is a sorry sight.

[*The light fades from the* GIRL, *and a light grows round the figure of* MACBETH, *whom we now see, at the Right. All else is in darkness.*]

GIRL'S VOICE : A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

MACBETH :

There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried "Murder !"
That they did wake each other. I stood and heard them :
But they did say their prayers, and addressed them.
Again to sleep.

[*The light fades and* MACBETH *disappears. The light grows round the* GIRL *again. She opens her eyes.*]

GIRL : Did you hear, Doorman ?

DOORMAN'S VOICE : I never heard nothing, miss. Why do you stand there so quiet ? You frighten me.

GIRL : Oh, there are memories here, Doorman, glorious words respoken from the past. The stage is full of them, I hear them beating in my head and out. Why are there no lights ? Why no orchestra ? Why is the stage empty ? They cannot act their old words over again without scenery.

DOORMAN'S VOICE : Come away, miss...come away...

GIRL: Listen, Doorman......They confuse me, tumbling through my head...

ANTONY'S VOICE (*from the darkness at the Left of the stage*):

O mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils.
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.

GIRL: Marc Antony. Do you hear, Doorman? Listen I hear Romeo......Stop them, Doorman—stop them!....

ROMEO'S VOICE (*from the darkness at the Right of the stage.*)

Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

GIRL:

O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable......

Stop! Stop them, Doorman!—they all come at once, I can't listen any more! Where are you, Doorman?

DOORMAN'S VOICE: There's no one here but us, miss. Come away now......

LEAR'S VOICE (*from the Left of the stage*):

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, down'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head!......

GIRL (*raising her arms above her head*): Stop!

WITCH'S VOICE (*from the Right of the stage*):

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;

Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog...

GIRL (*blindly running to the Right as the* VOICE *fades*): Stop! (*She returns to the Centre distressed.*) Stop these ghosts, these voices! Why are there no lights? Why do they torment me like this?

[*The lighting becomes as it was in the beginning. The* DOORMAN *is dimly seen.*]

DOORMAN: Quiet, miss, quiet. You mustn't shout like that.

[*He comes down to her, puts an arm about her comfortingly.*]

GIRL: Did you not hear?

DOORMAN: There's nothing, miss. There's nothing to hear. You're trembling. Are you cold?

GIRL: Leave me. Leave me, Doorman—I'm afraid of them.

DOORMAN: There's no one to be afraid of, miss.

GIRL (*walking to the Right, then to the Left*): You can't say that, Doorman. There are hundreds of people here. Voices, voices...lines from old plays, new plays. They are still here, they never leave the stage. You have only to listen, and you will hear them all—each word as it was spoken long ago, even the rustle of past audiences, each sound of feet sliding across, each movement—all preserved, innumerable ghosts whispering, rustling, the gay with the sober, all here, a spirit-company. Can you not hear the footsteps? I hear them. Actors walking the boards, each sound separate, each pause distinct. I hear their costumes moving past, their glasses clinking. The fragrance of their powder still remains. White hands lifted gently to be kissed.

White shoulders caught by amber light, the flash of white teeth in a smile, rose lips speaking. Oh Doorman—why is all this so sad? This old stage, so crowded with its memories—why can it not forget?

A VOICE:

You cannot forget us, we cannot be forgotten:
Out of great darkness and the past we still come back
To this fantastic sounding-board, matrix
Of all our being, wherein we were formed.
This is no empty speaking-place, this is
No soap-box for the thunder of machines:
We are not turned out piece-meal by the score
And set abroad to perish at the fall
Of each new Curtain, murdered by applause.
Words, spoken once and acted on this Stage,
We still remain. Tear up the ghostly boards,
Envelop if you will the wings in ruins,
Pull down the arch of the Proscenium,
Confound the echoes with a fall of timber,
Scatter this mute and ornamented hall,
Pile brick on bricks, raise dust among the aisles,
Bring down the roof upon the Royal Stalls,
Strip bare the plaster, fire the dusty flats,
Uproot the settled pile from its foundations
And cart it off in barrows to the dust-heap—
Do what you will, perform your worst destruction,
We still remain. Oblivion is not
For us. We are the Drama and the Stage.
Destroy us if you will, but you must hear us.
We are the Words, the Drama, netted soft,
Enclosed in this shadowy prison, the Stage.

And how can you destroy us, having heard?
And having destroyed, how can you fail to hear?
[*The* GIRL, *who has stood listening, looks about in wonder.*]

GIRL; Do you hear, Doorman? "How can you fail to hear?"

DOORMAN: I don't hear nothing, miss. Come away, now, you've stayed long enough. You're not well. I don't like to see you like this. What is it? What's the matter? What's troubling you? There's nothing to be seen here, in this old place—you're dreaming things. Why don't you go now, before they come?

GIRL (*not looking at him; looking in the direction from which the* VOICE *spoke, with a sort of ecstasy*): I can't...I can't...

DOORMAN (*coaxingly*): You wouldn't like to see me get in a row over you, would you now? I've done all I can, I can't do more. If I was to let you stay here without permission...

GIRL: Destroy them, Doorman. (*With a growing fear.*) We must destroy them, these old ghosts, turn back their voices and forget. I have been glad to hear them I was drawn by a new magic, they found me waiting: but now I am frightened. See—I am cold and very frightened—I will not hear them—I can't listen any more—I can't! They frighten me! Why am I here? They are quite new, they mock me in their silence, it is a whispering mockery of a silence, filled with wide eyes staring with careful expressions of hate. (*Pause*).

(*She looks up in terror. The* DOORMAN *moves fretfully in the shadows at the back.*]

cold and very frightened—I will not hear them—I can't listen any more—I can't! They frighten me! Why am I here? They are quiet now, they mock me in their silence, it is a whispering mockery of a silence, filled with wide eyes staring with careful expressions of hate. (*Pause*).

[*She looks up in terror. The* DOORMAN *moves fretfully in the shadows at the back.*]

No...no! They will not stop! Doorman, I can't listen any more! It is a gloating chorus, challenging me to join myself to them—for they know I will not... Do they know that? Even they?

[*Starting faintly, there comes out of the darkness a murmur of noise, men and women laughing, talking quickly, slowly, happily, sadly, all together; now crying out, now shouting; and singing voices, very quiet, and the sounds of quarrels, and of jubilant merry-making.*

The GIRL *looks up with wide eyes, moves as if to push the* VOICES *from her. She walks backwards with her arms bent up before her, fear on her face. The* DOORMAN *is seen to shrug, and say,* "I can't hear nothing, miss," *but his voice cannot be heard.*]

GIRL (*calling out hysterically*): They are mocking me! Stop! Stop! They know I shall not join them! But I *will*! I will join them, Doorman, tell me that! I defy them—am I not an actress?

[*She clings to him, sliding down the floor, sobbing. The* VOICES *are fading.*]

DOORMAN (*soothingly*): Yes, yes, of course. Of course you are.

[*He half-carries her down-stage to the Centre. She lies on the floor, sobbing.*

The VOICES, *in fading, gradually merge into the one* VOICE *that spoke before.*]

VOICE: You cannot forget us, we cannot be forgotten.

[*The soft music of deep drums is heard.*]

GIRL (*raising herself*): Why are you tormenting me ?

[*The drums fade and die.*]

VOICE:

Torments are not ours, nor have we spite,
There is no rancour in us : we are past.
What can the future hold for us, that we
Should grow in bitterness ? How shall we mock
What is to come, since we ourselves are past ?
How shall *we* choose fresh members for our ranks,
How make selection from the present few,
Pick out the voices to enrich our number ?
We are but mute in this gay mystery,
It is for you to choose, we can but wait.
You yearn to join us, yet you are afraid.
Wherefore afraid ? For what is there to fear ?
Only the darkness of oblivion,
Which comes far later in this fantasy.
Wait—are you not young ?

GIRL: See, I am young.
My body, and my spirit, they are young.

VOICE:

Why then distress yourself ? We comfort you,
And you resent it feebly.

VOICES: Is it you,
So sickly with your worried fears of us,
Who seek to join our company, to add
Your voice to ours, your little spoken words ?
We are a vast, a spirit company,

We tread the dusted stage, faint memories ;
There is a grandeur to us, and a splendour—
We are the Drama—come !—we are the Stage !
[*The* VOICES *swell in again, and grow loud as before.*]

GIRL : It is finished. I am not afraid. (*The* VOICES *fade, and are silent. The* DOORMAN *lifts her to her feet.*) I am faint. How hot it is now. I am braver now. I am not afraid any longer. Soon I will speak lines, and my words will join theirs, and linger on the stage.

DOORMAN : What queer things you are saying, miss. Why do you talk to yourself ?

GIRL : To myself ? So you have heard nothing yet. You cannot hear. Doorman, you cannot even see.—What do you see, looking about this stage.

DOORMAN (*humouring her*) : Dust, miss, only dust. When everything's cleared away, you can see the dust.

GIRL : What else ?

DOORMAN : Nothing else.

GIRL : Perhaps there is nothing else.

DOORMAN : The same old things. It never c' anges, one day to another. Ropes hanging at the back. Drop curtains. Bits of scenery. They get left in corners. Over here there is a ship's sail, here's tree ; it hasn't been used for months, there's no call for trees, the prop room's full of them. Here's an old cushion left behind. This was a door, painted a month ago and never used, they cut it out. They're always cutting things out, and they get left.

GIRL : And is that all ? And you can hear nothing ?

DOORMAN : Only the echoes of our voices, and the wind. Sometimes it moves the curtains.

GIRL (*dreamily*) : No. Of course, you will hear

nothing. That is different...They are gone now. How quiet—how quiet it is!

DOORMAN: Come along, miss. You can't stay any longer. You *must* go now. I hear them coming. There's to be a rehearsal. I can hear them coming.

GIRL: Let me stay.

[VOICES *are heard off Left, in harsh contrast to all the previous voices. These are the voices of the* ACTOR, *the* ACTRESS *and the* PRODUCER. *The* GIRL *moves back into the shadows.*]

ACTRESS (*coming on Left, gaudily dressed and smoking*): Why aren't there any lights?

PRODUCER (*following her on, holding a script*): Are they all here, Evans?

DOORMAN (*nervously*): I've seen no one yet, sir.

ACTRESS: This is a dirty hole without any lights.

ACTOR (*coming on Left, languidly*): Bill! We can't see!

ELECTRICIAN'S VOICE (*above*): O.K.! In a jiffy!

PRODUCER: It's always the same. Not a damn' soul here. How am I supposed to carry on a show by myself? Why can't they come at the proper time?

ACTRESS: I'm here. But I suppose I don't count, is that it? That's the thank's I get for slaving my guts out, working like a nigger, getting myself run down, just for the sake of your piffling little play.

PRODUCER: All right. There's nobody here but you then, my *dear*. Never forget that you're an actress, will you darling? Never forget that you are the most important thing in the Theatre. Never forget that without you the life-blood of the dear old Drama would fade and die. Never forget that because you are a star actress you are reserved the right to do whatever the

hell you choose, say whatever the hell you please, to whoever you like, and behave like a stainless aluminium god and get paid for it. (*As she makes to protest*) All right, all right, you're marvellous. Your unusual combination of talents will make the play. I forgot myself. (*Shouting*) But isn't enough to make anyone forget himself—? Evans! Where is everybody?

DOORMAN: I don't know, sir.

PRODUCER: Then damn' well find out! What are you supposed to be doing here?

ACTOR (*shouting up into the flies*): Lights!

DOORMAN: I don't know, sir.

PRODUCER: Where's Mr. Staines? Drinking. Where's Miss Clittering? Bring me a chair! I order a rehearsal for a certain time, and not a soul takes any notice of me. What the hell's a rehearsal for? So they can all troop off and get tight? Why can't I have everyone here?

ACTOR: Is there any chance, do you think, Bill, of our having any lights?

BILL'S VOICE: I've only got one pair of hands, Mr. Everett.

ACTOR: Yes, I believe you told me once before.

PRODUCER: What in God's name do you think you're playing at up there?

BILL'S VOICE: Be ready directly.

PRODUCER: Is no one going to find me a chair?

ACTRESS: Do bring the poor dear a chair.

DOORMAN: There's one here.

[*He brings one from the back. The* PRODUCER *places it at the footlights, facing up-stage, and sits.*]

PRODUCER: Billie, you might take your coat off.

ACTRESS: And catch my death of cold? Haven't I

got a bad throat as it is? D'you want me to make a first-night entrance on a stretcher?

PRODUCER: If you've a bad throat you should have told me. What's the mattar with it?

ACTRESS: It's strained.

PRODUCER: I don't wonder.

ACTRESS: Thanks.

PRODUCER: Are you gargling?

ACTRESS: What time have I for gargling?

PRODUCER: I've no idea. If it's very bad you'd better see a doctor.

ACTRESS: I don't believe in doctors.

PRODUCER: Well, that's fine. That's fine. Is there anything the matter with *you*, Mr. Everett?

ACTOR: In the pink, old boy. How are you?

BILL'S VOICE: You'll 'ave to make do with green.

[*The stage is flooded in weird green light.*]

PRODUCER (*rushing from his chair*): Good, God, am I a mermaid? Take it out! Take it out! (*He waves his arms at* BILL.)

[*The green light goes out.*]

(*sitting again*): Confound it! Billie, put that cigarette out.

ACTRESS: Must I?

PRODUCER: I would consider it a great favour.

ACTRESS (*dropping her cigarette and treading on it*): Well, I'm ready.

ACTOR: I refuse to start in pitch darkness.

PRODUCER: Now, Bill! Must we light candles?

BILL'S VOICE: Won't be long now.

PRODUCER: Billie, have you had a copy of the script?

ACTRESS: Yes.

PRODUCER: Where is it?

ACTRESS: Haven't I been learning the damned thing

for the past fortnight? Don't you think I'm sick of the sight and smell of every word of it?

PRODUCER: You know your lines?

ACTRESS: I know 'em so well, I hate 'em.

PRODUCER: Very conscientious.

ACTOR: D'you feel like a sandwich, Billie?

ACTRESS: Yes: please, there's a dear boy.

ACTOR: *Foie gras?*

ACTRESS: One ham and one chicken, and glass of milk.

PRODUCER: Wait, wait, wait...

ACTRESS: Oh, I'm sorry, Ducky. And a sausage roll for Ducky.

PRODUCER: No! Everett, stay where you are. There's going to be no sandwiches eaten until I say so. (*The stage is flooded in light. The* DOORMAN *is going off into the darkness at the back. The* GIRL *moves across the back to the Left.*) *That's* more like it. Now we'll have to take that garden scene, without the maid. Evans, come back here! Bring another chair! Bring another chair, and a cushion, and a basket of flowers. And see if Mr. Staines is about, and if he is tell him I want him, with the prompt copy.

DOORMAN (*going off*): Yes, sir.

ACTOR (*seeing the* GIRL): Hello. Visitors.

[*The* GIRL *stops, shyly.*]

PRODUCER (*shaking her script angily*): Who the devil are you?

GIRL: I'm sorry, I——

PRODUCER: What are you doing here?

GIRL: It's all right, I'm going now...

PRODUCER: Oh—it's *you*. Well? How did you get in *this* time?

GIRL: I wanted to see you, but it doesn't matter if you're busy.

PRODUCER: How many times do you want telling? Who let you in? Evans, I suppose—doddering old fool. I have no jobs. Do you understand plain English? What experience have you had?

GIRL: Very little, I know but——

PRODUCER: But! Yes! The same old story. No experience, but! Your Aunt Fanny says you'll make a wonderful Saint Joan, I suppose? It's no good. What do you know about the stage?

GIRL: I——

PRODUCER: Nothing! You know nothing; What good are you doing hanging about here? The stage is a profession—not a playground. Now clear out, once and for all! Hanging about here like a ghost! Evans! *Show this woman out!*

[*There is a silence while they watch the* GIRL *go off at the Left. The* VOICES *are heard again, a murmur of noise, men and women laughing, laughing, talking quickly, slowly, happily, sadly, all together; now crying out, now shouting; and singing voices, very quiet, and the sound of quarrels, and of jubilant merry making.*

The GIRL *goes. There is a silence. The* PRODUCER *shakes his script. The* DOORMAN *returns with a chair and a cushion and a basket of flowers. Suddenly the* ACTRESS *shivers.*]

PRODUCER: What's the matter with *you*?

ACTRESS: I don't know. I suddenly shivered. I had a funny feeling. How *quiet* it is here...

[*The* VOICES *have faded. The lights fade into darkness.*

CURTAIN

THE DISTANT DRUM

by

PHILIP JOHNSON

CHARACTERS

ALAN SARNE

OLIVE SIDDALL

LADY SARNE

LORD SARNE

MICHAEL KENLEY

The action of the play takes place in a room of Sarne Castle, on the late evening of a day in summer.

THE DISTANT DRUM

The Scene is a room in Sarne Castle. It is of quite modest proportions, having originally been designed as an ante-room to the more spacious library beyond, the door to which is in the Centre of the L. wall. There is another door Up R., and Down R. is the fire-place. The one window, very wide and almost the height of the room, is in the Centre of the Back wall. Out of this one can step on to a narrow terrace skirted by a low castellared wall. The ground in front of this evidently slopes at a steep angle, for from within the room nothing can be seen beyond save a stretch of sky. The room is comfortably furnished, though with no trace anywhere of modernity. The walls are the colour of stone, and there are one or two oilpaintings, blurred and crepuscular with age, in massive gilt frames. By the fireplace is an ornately-carved, high-backed chair. Below the fireplace is a stool. Slightly to R. of Centre is a settle, and behind it a round table littered over with an assortment of books and papers. L. of this table is a small easy-chair. Belw the door L., set against the wall, is a dresser, and on this are bottles, decanters and glasses. Upstage, in the L. corner, is a cabinet filled with a collection of silver cups, bowls, etc., sports prizes. Other articles of furniture may be disposed about the room, provided that they accord with the atmosphere and trend of the play.

When the curtain rises, it is the late evening of a day in summer, and the room, which is empty, is only very dimly revealed by the flickering light from a small fire which is burning. The curtains are drawn across the windows. There is no sound. Then a distant stable-clock chimes the half-hour slowly and ponderously. Silence again, broken at length by voices 'Off.' The next moment ALAN SARNE *enters R., switching on the lights as he does so. He is about thirty, pleasing rather than good-looking, with sensitive features and a quiet sincerity of manner.* OLIVE SIDDALL *comes on immediately after him. She is in the mid-twenties, a strikingly beautiful creature of perfect poise and self-possession, graceful and unhurried in her movements, and wearing an evening gown of that exquisite simplicity which is the achievement of so few dressmakers and the despair of so many.*

ALAN (*advancing into the room*) : This is the room we use most of all. Nearly all the others in the castle are very grand, but not particularly cosy. This one is.

OLIVE (*standing in the doorway, looking round*) : Yes ... yes, I see. Cosy.

[*A short pause. He stands gazing at her and at the picture she forms, framed in the doorway.*]

ALAN (*suddenly recollecting himself*) : Well—well, do sit down, won't you ? (*She walks slowly to the carved chair by the fire and sits. He sits on the R. arm of the settee, facing her*) You know, it's the most amazing thing. *The* most amazing. I simply can't get over it. (*She gives him an inquiring glance.*) That you should be here, really here. This time last night I was saying to myself. "In twenty-four hours from now

Olive will be here." and—and—

OLIVE (*with a faint smile*): And lo and behold, I am.

ALAN: And glad to be?

OLIVE: Why, yes, dear, of course. (*With a shade more warmth*). Of course I'm glad, Alan.

ALAN (*rising—helping himself to a cigarette from a box on the table*): I suppose, in a way, this must be a pretty tremendous moment for you, too—eh?...After all, here you are, seeing for the first time the the place that's to be your home for the rest of your life. (*Smiling*) Aren't you finding that rather a staggering thought?

OLIVE: But we're not going to live actually here in the castle—not with your father and mother? You said—

ALAN: Oh, no, we'll be stowed away in the Dower House. I don't know if you noticed the place when you arrived: about half a mile from the first lodge. There's a pool in front of it where I caught my first pike. (*A little reminiscent smile—then continuing*) But, of course, when anything happens to Father, we'll move into the castle, here.

OLIVE: And your mother, Alan?

ALAN: Mother?...Well, I expect she'll retire to the Dower House. The usual custom, my dear.

OLIVE: I see...yes...

ALAN: Still, that probably won't be for a long time. (*Strolling to beside her chair*) We Sarnes live, oh, practically for ever. D'you know, there was a Lord Sarne, in the time of Elizabeth, who lived to a hundred and ten: and for the last fifty years of his life he never put his foot beyond the bounds of the estate.

OLIVE: I suppose we'll put our feet beyond it, occasionally, you and me?

ALAN: Oh, we'll go off for jaunts, now and then, just whenever we feel like it. (*Moving away a little*) Only I don't suppose we'll very often feel like it. I never go to London more than I can help, and when I do I feel like a foreigner, aching all the time to get back here, to Sarne. (*Looking at the tip of his cigarette*) You don't know what it means to me, this place. (*Then at her*) And it's going to mean every bit as much to you, Olive, I know it is. Why, in less than no time, you'll be a part of it: you'll belong to Sarne, just as I do, as we all do. (*Starting to pace slowly to and fro as he talks*) It's all—oh, I don't know—all so real, somehow. The farmers and the folk on the estate, there's nothing sham or fake about them. God! when you think of the crowd you meet in Town—the social set—they do something awful to me—hurt me...And, after all, it does mean something to know, we've lived here for hundreds and hundreds of years. Tradition, call it what you like. (*Ceasing to pace—his gaze seeming to travel beyond the walls of the room—quietly, as though talking to himself*) Empires, kingdoms and republics have had their little day and crashed; things that people thought terribly important are quite forgotten...but we Sarnes have gone on and on...

OLIVE (*changing her position slightly*): Just like John Brown's body, dear—or was it his soul?

ALAN (*jerking out of his train of thought*): I say, I'm awfully sorry boring you. And, for heaven's sake, don't imagine I carry on like that to all and sundry. It's only because—well, because you're going to be a Sarne, and

I want it all to mean as much to you as it does to me. (*Nearer to her*) And it's going to...(*Leaning over her*) You're going to be so happy here. Oliye. You'll see. Why, you'll just grow on to the place like—like—

OLIVE (*looking up at him*): Like moss on a wall.

ALAN (*a little laugh*): Yes.

OLIVE (*not echoing the laugh*): Yes. (*Rises abruptly*) D'you think I could have a drink ?

ALAN: What ? Why, yes, of course, darling. (*Crossing to the dresser*) What would you like ?

OLIVE: Brandy—and rather a lot of it, please.

ALAN: Right.

[*While he is pouring out the drink, his back to her, a curious look, half amused, half scornful, flickers across her face. Then she yawns.*]

ALAN (*turning—holding up the glass*): That do ?

OLIVE (*shaking her head*): Lost more, dear.

ALAN: I say !

[*He adds some more, then takes it across to where she is standing by the fireplace, one arm stretched along the mantelshelf.*]

OLIVE: Thank you. (*Takes a sip, then looks at him*) It's quite all right: you needn't be afraid. I shan't suddenly start screaming and hiccuping and running round the place, clawing at the tapestry.

ALAN (*smiling indulgently*): You know, Olive, you do amuse me when you pretend to be all worldly and hard-boiled. You do, really.

OLIVE (*drinking*): M'm ?

ALAN: But it doesn't take me in, my dear; because, you see, I happen to know the real you that's behind it all. Oh, yes.

OLIVE (*raising her eyebrows—mockingly*) : After—how long is it—five weeks ?

ALAN : I think I know every tiniest thing there is to know about you. (*She flashes a quick look at him, then laughs*) Oh, you may laugh.

OLIVE : I can't help it ; you're so—so.

She doesn't want ever to talk to her That is why her sentences are incomplete.

ALAN : So what ?

OLIVE : I can't just think of the word, dear. (*Drinks*)

ALAN : Never mind. Give me a kiss, instead.

OLIVE (*yielding her cheek, then withdrawing it*) : There.

ALAN (*with sudden passion—about to embrace her*) : Oh, my dear...

OLIVE (*quickly—checking him*) : Careful ! The brandy ! No, please, Alan, not just now !

ALAN (*looking a bit dashed*) : I'm sorry, darling.

[*She turns away, moves Upstage, then across the Back towards L. He pitches his cigarette into the fire.*]

OLIVE (*by the cabinet*) : Tell me, what *are* all these things ?

ALAN : Those ? Ronnie's trophies. Ronnie was a mighty athlete. Still is, though he's keenest on his flying, these days.

OLIVE : How lovely. And does he win medals and things and hang them on his watch-chain ?

ALAN : I believe he's escaped those, so far.

OLIVE : Funny to think you've a brother who's a famous airman. Is he like you ?

ALAN : Not a bit. Ronnie's the sort who'd die if ever he had to 'stay put.' He's all vitality and—and 'go.' A grand soul, though. You'll like him. At the present moment he's whizzing through the air at a great rate, midway between Heaven and the

Atlantic, trying to set up a new speed record or something. (*After a moment*) I'm afraid Mother's a bit fussed about him to-night.

OLIVE (*with elaborate carelessness*): Your mother? Oh—oh, yes.

ALAN: He is a bit overdue—that is, if he left Cape Cod when it was reported he did. Still, he'll come through all right: he always does. (*Hesitating, then as though forcing himself to broach a difficult subject*): I—I do hope you're going to like Father and Mother (*As though she has not heard, she goes to the table and puts her glass down*) Olive, I do hope.

OLIVE (*interrupting—but very calmly and steadily*): My dear Alan, I don't know about your father—yet: so far as your mother's concerned, she set eyes on me for the first time about six hours ago...and she's already made up her mind that I'm just the sort of woman she was so afraid I might be.

ALAN (*weakly*): Oh, come, now—

OLIVE (*vigorously*): She loathes me! Loathes me! And didn't mind letting me see it, either.

ALAN: But, darling——

OLIVE (*controlling herself—firmly*): No! That's quite as much as I'm going to say, to-night. I hadn't meant to talk of it at all.

ALAN: But you must realise that all this fuss over Ronnie.

OLIVE (*icily*): I realise everything perfectly. And now we're going to talk about something else. (*Helping herself to a cigarette from the box on the table*) Michael's a long time, isn't he?

ALAN: Michael? Oh, Captain Kenley. I rather think Father's showing him the armoury.

OLIVE (*looking at him from under her lids—as she lights her cigarette*) : You...don't like Michael, do you ?

ALAN (*with overdone carel ssness*) : Like him ? I hardly know the fellow.

OLIVE : I hope you don't mind my foisting him on to you for the night, anyway.

ALAN (*in the same tone*) : Not a bit.

OLIVE : But as he happened to be coming this way in the car...and the train would have been pretty black, God knows.

ALAN (*forcing a more affable note*) : And he'll be leaving early in the morning, he says...Have you known him long ?

OLIVE (*moving round to the front of the settee—sitting*) : Michael ? Oh, yes...yes, quite a long time. (*She smiles as though to herself*)

ALAN : Why the smile ?

OLIVE : Was I ?

ALAN (*standing by the R. side of the settee*) : He just happens to be a type I haven't much in common with. And at dinner.. Just once...I happened to catch him looking at you. I hate to see a man look at a woman like that.

OLIVE (*throwing her head back with a short laugh*) : You know, you *are* quaint.

ALAN : Am I ? (*A short pause. He looks at her, then sits beside her*) Olive...

OLIVE : Yes ?

ALAN (*very earnestly*) : There...isn't any doubt in your mind about things, is there ? (*She looks at him*) You do love me ?

OLIVE (*laying her hand lightly on his knee*) : I've

said so more than once, haven't I ?

ALAN (*clasping her hand*): I can't hear you say it often enough, if I'm to feel...safe.

OLIVE (*withdrawing her hand*): Safe ?

ALAN: You see, in a way, I'm rather frightened, dear. Oh, it sounds mad, I know, but I am. Meeting you has been the most perfect thing that ever happened to me... A sort of fulfilment, as though every thing in my life was now most beautifully complete...because I've met you. Don't you see ? I never realised it at the time—I suppose men don't until they actually meet the one woman—but nothing was really quite as it should be: all a bit muddled and blurred. And then, one day, well, there you were, and, quite suddenly, everything sort of slipped into focus and became all clear-cut and real and—and quite unbelievably wonderful, my dear...And that's why I'm scared, because...if anything happened to spoil it now. I—(*very quietly*)—wouldn't be able to go on, that's all. It would be the end. (*She looks at him as though not quite understanding*) Of me. (*He rises*) You see, you mean so very much to me, dear.

OLIVE (*after a moment—rising—facing him*): Definitely, you are a funny sort of person.

ALAN: I don't know. Sometimes I think I feel things more deeply than most. But—(*his hands on her shoulders*) I do love you so much. You're so good, there's something so—so honest about you. I know that whoever else may let me down, you never will... And it is so lovely to know that.

[*Still gripping her shoulders, he bends his head towards her as though to kiss her.*]

OLIVE (*wincing and drawing back*): Alan! Please!

My shoulders ! You're hurting.

ALAN (*releasing heart once*): Darling, I'm so sorry.

OLIVE (*quickly—as though to distract his mood—pointing to the window*): Er—what's that?

ALAN: A window. You can get out through it on to the terrace. Whould you like to see? (*He goes to the window and draws the curtains aside. Outside, the low, castellated well gleams white, with nothing visible beyond save the sweep of clear, moon-haunted sky*) There, now ! Come outside and take a look.

[*He goes out on to the terrace. She follows him more slowly.*]

OLIVE: Why, what a long way you can see! Miles and miles.

ALAN: Such a wonderful night. Light as day almost.

OLIVE (*pointing Down and towards the Right*): Except just that patch of dark. Why is it all dim down there?

ALAN: Oh, it lies low, and there's always mist. The Drummer's Valley, they call it.

OLIVE : Why Drummer's ?

ALAN: There's some sort of a family legend about a drummer boy: the Drummer of Sarne. Mother tells it better than I do probably because she believes in it so implicitly.

OLIVE : Is it a ghost story?

ALAN: A sort of ghost story, yes. I wouldn't ask her about it to-night, though, I mean, she's a bit wrought-up about Ronnie, and—and—

OLIVE (*the icy hardness that always comes into her voice at mention of his mother*): I'm not in the least

likely to ask your mother...(*Then her tone changing*) Is it all very ghoulish and grim ? demon that ...

ALAN : M'yes. Pretty grim...And now, darling, I think that's enough about ghosts for to-night. (*His hand on her arm*) Let's go in.

OLIVE (*withdrawing her arm*) : No, wait, wait a minute. (*Still looking towards the valley*) It's curious...that bit all dark, and the rest bright moonlight.

ALAN : It's the overhanging rocks that keep it in shadow. They keep the sun out, too. Oh, there's no denying the place has a certain creepiness. The villagers have their own name for it : the Bad Lands.

OLIVE ; The Bad Lands. (*Turning to him*) Do you ever go down there at night alone ?

ALAN : Why on earth should I ?

OLIVE (*looking at him very narrowly*) : You'd be afraid to ?

ALAN (*with an uneasy little laugh*) : I don't know about 'afraid', (*As she continues to look at him*) Why do you look at me like that ?

OLIVE : It isn't only your mother and the villagers who believe in this—ghost or whatever it is : you believe too, don't you, Alan ?

ALAN (*still forcing a light tone*) : My dear, the Drummer of Sarne happens to be our own pet family spook. I treat it with a certain amount of respect, that's all. (*As her expression wavers into a little smile*) And what are you smiling at ?

OLIVE : Was I smiling ? (*Turning away—coming Down into the room—a trace of mockery in her tone*) And are there ghosts inside the castle ? Those dark rooms and passages I saw before dinner—are there *things* there, too ? She thinks that they are afraid the darkness of the valley that is why she asks that their ... thinks that gho...

[*As she speaks, the figure of a woman appears on the terrace outside, gliding on from R., a woman of about fifty, very erect in her carriage, pale with greying hair, and wearing a dress of grey silk, tight-bodiced and full-skirted. At sight of the two within the room the woman pauses, then stands, motionless, framed by the window opening, the moonlight tracing in rippling, silvery outline the edges of her gown, unearthly, wraith-like.*] like a spectre

ALAN (*who has followed* OLIVE—*standing close behind her*): Ghosts again? Listen, darling. You've a good many years in front of you to get to know all about Sarne and its inhabitants, visible *and* invisible, and to learn to love it and them as much as I do.

OLIVE (*not smiling now—silent for a moment—then facing him*): Alan, supposing (*Hesitates*).

ALAN (*encouragingly*): Well?

OLIVE (*abruptly*): Supposing one day you had to choose between Sarne and me—which would win?

ALAN: Choose between (*Protestingly*) Now, look here, my dear.

OLIVE (*catching sight over his shoulder of the figure on the terrace*): Oh! Ssh!

ALAN: What? (*Swings round*) Why, Mother, what on earth are you doing out there?

LADY SARNE (*coming into the room—her eyes on him alone*): I couldn't rest: I thought perhaps if I walked in the garden. (*Going to him.* OLIVE *turns away to L.*) Alan, we've had no word yet, and I'm beginning to to feel more and more worried. If anything should have happened.

ALAN (*comfortingly*): Nothing has......Ronnie's all

right. Get that quite firmly wedged in your mind and stop imagining things. Ronnie's—all—right. There!

LADY SARNE: Then why hasn't he telephoned? He promised he would the moment he landed, and that should have been hours ago.

ALAN: A hundred and one things may have happened to delay him. But he's all right; and at any moment we may hear the telephone ringing to tell us so.

LADY SARNE (*in a low voice*): I'm so afraid...afraid it may be something else we'll hear.

ALAN (*quietly*): Now, Mother, please.

LADY SARNE: Something else...Out there, in the garden, I felt I wanted to press my hands over my ears to shut out the sound that might come at any moment ...the sound of the drum.

OLIVE (*sharply*): Drum?

ALAN: Mother, this is foolish of you. You're just a bundle of nerves to-night; that's what's wrong with you.

OLIVE (*coldly casual*): Why don't you have a brandy, Lady Sarne? She considers her fear to be merely weak thoughts.

LADY SARNE (*allowing her glance to rest on her face for no more than an instant*): No, thank you, Miss Siddall.

ALAN: Or what about bed, eh? Now, that's an idea!

LADY SARNE (*going to by the fireplace*): No—no, I couldn't. (*She sits on the carved chair*) I'm afraid I interrupted you just now, Alan. Miss Siddall had just asked you a question—I couldn't help overhearing—whether she or Sarne would win if you had to choose between them. She's still waiting for her answer.

ALAN (*uncomfortably*): Oh—Olive was only joking, Mother.

LADY SARNE (*coldly—her eyes studiedly avoiding* OLIVE) Really ? Miss Siddal will forgive me, I hope, if I find myself entirely unable to appreciate her joke.

[OLIVE, *her fists clenched at her sides, gives vent to a suppressed, scarcely audible exclamation.*]

ALAN (*going to beside his mother's chair—after a quick, apprehensive glance from one woman to the other—trying to force an easy manner*) : Mother, darling, do please stop calling her Miss Siddall. Olive's quite a nice name, you know.

OLIVE (*bursting out*) : It isn't my name your mother objects to. She's far from sure that *I'm* a nice person—(*moving to C.*)—eh, Lady Sarne ? Isn't that it ?

LADY SARNE (*ignoring her—reaching up with her hand to his sleeve*) : Do you mind if we don't talk about... things, to night ? Please, Alan !

OLIVE : We don't have to, because you've already made up your mind about me, haven't you ? Oh, I know ! (*She helps herself to a cigarette from the box on the table*)

ALAN (*to her—placatingly*) : Don't be silly, darling. Mother hasn't had time to get to know you yet, and—

OLIVE (*speaking to him, but her eyes on* LADY SARNE) : And she's quite determined she never will. Her whole manner, from the moment I arrived here— —

ALAN (*anxiously*) : Olive, please !

LADY SARNE (*rising*) : I think, dear, I'll go and find your father. (*He takes a step towards her—checking him as he is about to speak*) No, please, not to-night, not to-night dear.

[*She turns and goes towards the door R.* OLIVE'S *expression has grown mask-like and hard.*]

ALAN (*to her—in an undertone*): Darling, Mother's all nervy just now about Ronnie. She didn't mean—

OLIVE: Oh, be quiet! (*The cigarette snaps in two between her fingers*) Damn! (*Tosses the piece on to the ash-tray*)

LADY SARNE (*by the door—pausing as she is about to go out*): I think I hear your father now. Yes! (*Through the open door to* LORD SARNE '*off*') Edward, is there any news yet?

(LORD SARNE *comes in, followed by* CAPTAIN MICHAEL KENLEY. *The former is slightly older than his wife, very upright and distinguished looking, still handsome and with a quiet air of courtesy which occasionally becomes tinged with a faint aloofness.* CAPTAIN KENLEY, *thirty-ish, is handsome too, and very well-groomed—if anything, a trifle too well-groomed, since the resultant effect rather suggests Hollywood's idea of a London Man-About-Town*)

LORD SARNE (*pausing by his wife—quietly*): Not yet, Lucy, not yet.

KENLEY (*strolling towards the other two, C.*): Hullo, you two!

OLIVE (*controlling herself—lightly*): Michael—what an age you've been! I never suspected you of a passion for old armour.

KENLEY: I assure you, I've been most interested, most. (*To* ALAN) Must have taken some time to get that little lot together, eh?

ALAN: Only about five hundred years.

KENLEY: Really? I'm afraid I know next to nothing

about such things, but your father's been most kind, explaining.

ALAN (*politely*): He's always very pleased to—won't you have a drink ?

KENLEY: Well—thanks.

[*He goes to the dresser. During this,* LORD SARNE *has been talking to his wife, trying to reassure her.*]

LORD SARNE (*leading her a little Downstage*): But, good heavens, it isn't the first time Ronnie's been a few hours overdue. Why, on that South American flight there wasn't sign of him for two whole days.

LADY SARNE: Somehow, I didn't mind so much then. I didn't feel then as I do now. I can't explain it, Edward, but...

LORD SARNE (*gently*): Now, my dear...

KENLEY (*having poured himself a drink*): What interested me as much as anything, sir, was the drum. I can't think why, but it did.

LADY SARNE (*sharply*): Drum ? (*To* LORD SARNE) You've been showing him the drum ?

LORD SARNE: It's the first thing most visitors want to see when they come to Sarne. (*To* KENLEY) I'm rather surprised that you should never have heard of it before.

KENLEY: But I rather think I have, vaguely. Some sort of story attached, isn't there ?

LADY SARNE (*spiritedly*): Something more than a mere story, Captain Kenley: the Drummer of Sarne is real enough, I assure you. Oh, yes.

[OLIVE *flashes a mocking little smile at* KENLEY, *but fails to catch his eye.*]

ALAN (*going to his father—quietly*): Father—I don't think we want to hear about it to-night.

LADY SARNE (*overhearing this aside*): Why not? To-night of all nights, I should have thought; and then, if they hear the sound...Tell them, Edward. (*She turns, glances towards* OLIVE *then goes towards the window, pausing there, and speaking over her shoulder*) Tell them no.

[*She goes out on to the terrace and stands, looking towards the valley. Throughout the following scene she remains there, very still, in her grey dress, almost ghost-like herself in her greyness and stillness.* ALAN *has made as though to follow her, but his father checks him.*]

LORD SARNE: No. Best leave her alone.

KENLEY (*after taking a drink*): Well sir?

[CAPTAIN KENLEY, *glass in hand, is standing down L.* OLIVE *is by the easy-chair, one arm resting along the back of it;* LORD SARNE *is slightly to R. of the table;* ALAN *moves to Down R. and sits on the stool, his hands clasped round his knees, his eyes fixed all the time on* OLIVE, *never once leaving her.*]

LORD SARNE: There's little to tell, really—except that a great many years ago there was a Sarne, Roger Sarne, who was—well, just about as rotten as a man could be. Roger Sarne's little weakness seems to have been a quite ungovernable temper: once let him get into a rage, and there was no knowing how or where it was going to end...as a certain poor little devil of a drummer-boy found to his cost. (*Turns and flicks his cigar-ash into the fire, then resumes*) No one knows what he'd

done to ruffle his lordship, but the method of punishment is ancient history. (*He pauses*) He had the lad dragged away to the valley, thrust into a narrow cleft in the rocks, and the opening blocked up with boulders.. and left there, Captain Kenley, to die.

KENLEY: But surely—I mean, did no one try to get him out?

LORD SARNE: No one would have dared...They say that for five days and nights his drum was heard, beating a tattoo for the help that never came but on the sixth day it was silent...Years latter, someone shifted the boulders and found the skelton, and of course the drum—the one you saw just now.

KENLEY (*with more politeness than credulity*): Really? How very, very interesting!

OLIVE (*twisting a bangle on her wrist*): And is that all?

LORD SARNE: Not quite, Miss Siddall. There is a sequel. They say that the drummer-boy still bears his drum—they say it is still heard...But only on one particular occasion, to announce the death of a Sarne. The drum is always heard then they say.

OLIVE: To announce the death (*Looking towards the terrace*) So that's why she.

LORD SARNE (*a few steps towards the window—louder*): Lucy please, won't you come inside? You'll be taking cold out there,

[*She moves a few short paces towards the window, her head still turned towards the valley.*]

LADY SARNE: The mist in the valley seems to be moving now, swirling round very slowly. It looks.

ALAN (*in a practical tone*): Probably there's a wind getting up.

LADY SARNE: No. It's all quite still. (*She comes into the room—pausing by* OLIVE) You were interested, Miss Siddall ?

OLIVE (*casually*): I'm always interested in old superstitions, (*adding, with meaning*) old prejudices, too. Lady Sarne.

LADY SARNE'S *look lingers on her face for a further second, then she turns away.*]

KENLEY (*after a little cough*): And—and you can see this valley from here ?

OLIVE: Come and look, Michael. (*At* LADY SARNE'S *back*) This room's stifling, anyway.

(*She trails out on to the terrace,* KENLEY *at her side,* ALAN *following.*]

LORD SARNE (*as soon as they are alone*): Lucy, I'm not sure, but I strongly suspect that you're behaving just a little unwisely. You're not usually so lacking in self-control, my dear.

LADY SARNE: Self-control ! With one of my sons perhaps dead—

LORD SARNE: Oh, come—

LADY SARNE: And the other infatuated by—that woman !

LORD SARNE: Now, listen ; we hardly know her yet ; we must be charitable, and not—

LADY SARNE (*bitterly*): I don't want a daughter-in-law I have to be charitable to. Alan must be blind and mad, not to see her for what she is. Blind *and* mad !

LORD SARNE (*soothingly*): Yes, yes, I know. Still, there's time yet. Perhaps it may not come to anything. You never know, dear.

LADY SARNE: It won't be her fault if it doesn't; and as for Alan, he told me yesterday he couldn't live without her. Couldn't live! She's been as clever as only a woman of her type can be—and she's *got* him! (*He sighs helplessly*) Oh, Edward, can't you see the difference she's going to make to everything and everybody, when she's Alan's wife? Nothing will be the same: she's already begun by setting Alan against us—against me, at any rate. You can see how it's going to be.

LORD SARNE: Lucy! For heaven's sake! They'll hear you!

LADY SARNE: I'm sorry; but, really, as if all this anxiety over Ronnie weren't enough...Edward, I feel that this one night is going to change the whole course of our lives...this one hour, perhaps...that for as long as we both live we'll look back on it with horror—

LORD SARNE (*expostulating*): My dear! As for Ronnie, now there I'm convinced you're torturing yourself quite needlessly. (*Turning to crush his cigar out in the ash-tray*) And, after all, you do profess to believe in the warning of the drum—eh?

LADY SARNE: I do believe—and so do you.

LORD SARNE: Well it hasn't sounded to-night, my dear.

LORD SARNE: Not yet...I only feel that Ronnie's in great danger...that it may sound...and that the suspense—

LORD SARNE (*forcing a bantering tone*): Of course, if you're determined to be all grim and bodeful, I shall just be thoroughly medieval and have you ducked in the pond, or burnt as a witch, or—or something equally horrid. So there!

[*She smiles at him a trifle wanly. He kisses her. Out on the terrace* OLIVE *laughs.*]

LADY SARNE (*her body stiffening*): Listen! Listen to the future Lady Sarne!

LORD SARNE (*quickly*): Let's go into the library. It's quiet in there. Come along, Lucy: come with me.

[*His hand on her arm, he leads her towards the door L.*]

OLIVE (*on the terrace*): I've suddenly gone all shivery. I'm going in.

[*She turns to come into the room, her movement being simultaneous with that of the two within the room. Seeing them, she pauses in the window opening. They pause, too; and just for a second all movement is arrested, all action suspended, and they stand, the two within the room, the woman framed in the opening, the two men on the moonlit terrace; for no more than a second, though; then* LORD *and* LADY SARNE *proceed on their way, and so into the library, closing the door behind them. Not until it has closed does* OLIVE *move; then she comes into the room, followed by the men.*]

KENLEY (*as they do so*): You're quite right; it has grown colder. Much colder.

OLIVE (*not looking at him, but towards the library door*): Alan, be an angel and find that white scarf thing of mine, will you? I think I had it at dinner; or it may be in the drawing-room.

ALAN: I'll find it.

[*He hurries off R. She goes by the fireplace and stands there, her back to the room.* KENLEY, *behind the table, looks at her; then, with a*

delibrate air, he crushes his cigarette into the ash-tray and crosses to immediately behind her. There is a pause. Then :]

KENLEY : Well ?

OLIVE (*still with her back to him*) : Well ?

KENLEY : A beautful place. Beautiful. Quite one of *the* stateliest homes of England, I should say. And all complete, even to the ghost. I congratulate you, Olive ; really, I do.

OLIVE (*turning slowly to face him*) : Thank you, Michael.

KENLEY (*holding out his hand*) : Er—may I ?

[*She give him her hand ; he raises it to his lips. Still holding her hand he looks at her, and she at him.*]

KENLEY : And what have you sent the love-lorn swain in search of ?

OLIVE : A non-existent scarf.

KENLEY : In the good old Edwardian days it was usually a mislaid fan, I'm told ...He's madly in love with you, of course.

OLIVE : Quite, quite madly, bless him. (*Blows a kiss towards the door R.*)

KENLEY : And you just adore him, don't you ?

OLIVE ; Passionately. (*A little laugh*)

KENLEY (*amused*) : Devil ! (*Sits on the settee*) However, so long as you've got what you want.

OLIVE : I have—*and* I'm going to stick to it. This is my chance, and nobody's going to cheat me out of it. Nobody, Michael ! (*She looks towards the library door*) Nobody...

KENLEY : Eh ? (*Following her look*) Oh...

OLIVE (*with a sort of suppressed fury*) : She hates me. loathes me, but not half so much as I hate and loathe her...She may treat me like dirt now, if she likes :

but later, when I'm married to her ewe lamb of a son—well, she'd better look out, that's all. (*Going to beside the settee*) Did you see the way she behaved to me at dinner? I might have been just a—a—

KENLEY: Just a scheming adventuress. Quite.

OLIVE: I could have hurled thing at her.

KENLEY: Frankly, I was expecting you to, at any moment.

OLIVE: No—oh, no, Michael—not yet...not yet. (*Sits on the arm of the settee—then, hunching her shoulders gleefully*) Think; I'm going to be absolutely safe and secure, with a position and as much money as I shall know what to do with for the rest of my life. (*Closing her eyes a wide gesture—rapturously*) Ah!—

KENLEY: It sounds good.

OLIVE: It is good. [*Opening her eyes—leaning towards him—with a little snigger*]. *He* thinks we're going to live here for always. *He* thinks I'm going to merge, oh, so beautifully into the landscape. I'm to be the lady of the manor, Michael.' Think!

KENLEY (*with a smile*): I'm thinking.

OLIVE: He says he knows every tiniest thing there is to know about me. (*Nods her head*) Fact.

KENLEY (*sharply*): What? (*Then seeing her expression*) Poor lamb...I wonder what he's done to deserve it.

OLIVE: But he's wildly happy. I'm his life's dream come true.

KENLEY: And later?

OLIVE (*instantly serious—rising*): Later? I'm going to be careful. Definitely. Of course, it isn't all

going to be *quite* as he thinks. Not quite. I'm going to go on having fun—

KENLEY (*reaching up and taking her hand*): I hope we're both going to go on having fun—eh ?

OLIVE (*looking at him*): Yes...(*Then, withdrawing her hand*) But I'm not going to do anything spectacularly foolish, Michael. No.

KENLEY (*with a smile*): No ?

OLIVE: No. [*She moves away—towards Upstage*)

KENLEY (*rising*): I see. (*He goes to the dresser*)

[*A short pause*.]

OLIVE (*Upstage—staring at the door again*): *She's* in that room, now, talking about me, setting that poker-backed husband of hers against me. I could have managed him all right, alone. But her...I met her a few hours ago, and I feel now as if I'd known her and *hated* her all my life. (*Going to him*) It's queer, isn't it ? We knew from the very first moment, we two, that we were enemies.

KENLEY (*who has poured himself a drink*): Still, I somehow don't see her going out of her way to hurt you.

OLIVE: Oh, dear, no ! That would be beneath her dignity. I'm not worth it. Oh, it's easy enough to see the line *she's* going to take : I'm to be ignored, treated as though I don't exist. She'll never come out into the open ; not she ! I'm to be made to feel like a bad drain —that's all Ha ! (*Her fist s clenched at her sides*) Oh—oh, how I'd like to shake her. Not physically ; not with my hands ; it's that maddening self-assurance I'd like to break down—if only for a moment. (*Looking towards the library again*) Oh, how I'd like to do that !

KENLEY (*lightly*): Fate, my dear, may save you the trouble by doing it for you—and before long...If the air-minded younger son really has come to grief.

OLIVE: Her other ewe lamb! Yes! If only that precious drum thing of theirs would sound! And if only I could be standing by, to—to see her crumple.

KENLEY: You don't mean to say you believe in that old yarn?

OLIVE: Of course I don't. She does, though, because, don't you see? It's a *Sarne* ghost, and so it *must* be taken seriously. (*A short laugh that suddenly snaps off*) If only it *were* true, and if only it *would* sound...... to-night!

KENLEY (*Strolling over to the fireplace*): Common sense somehow seems to suggest that it won't.

[*She has made a movement as though to sit, but, as though his words have fired a most providential and timely train of thought, she pauses, snaps her fingers softly, then looks at him with an expression that grows more and more calculating as the scheme develops in her mind. Then, after a fairly long pause*:]

OLIVE (*softly—and quite sweetly*): Why not Michael?

KENLEY (*not paying much attention*): M'm?

OLIVE (*still sweetly*): Why shouldn't it sound to-night? (*A swift glance at the library door—then going to him.*) Anybody can beat a drum, can't they? You could if you tried...couldn't you, Michael? M'm? If you tried? Of course you could.

KENLEY: Me? (*His voice a shade loud*) What on earth are you getting at? (*Puts his glass down on the mantelpiece.*)

OLIVE: Ssh! (*Fingering the lapels of his jacket*) Nice jacket. You remember the first night you wore it?

KENLEY (*his thoughts diverted at once—grinning*): I'll say I do, Olive. Monte. I won a packet early on; then we drove for miles along the Corniche.

OLIVE (*a little chuckling laugh*): A grand night.

KENLEY (*singing half under his breath*): "Night of stars and ni-hight of love......"

OLIVE (*giving his face a playful little slap*): Shut up! (*A tiny pause. She straightens his tie*) They... keep it in the armoury, don't they?—the drum?

KENLEY: Why—

OLIVE (*suddenly all matter-of-fact*): Listen to me: you're going to get that drum, you're going to take it out into the garden, somewhere where you'll be quite hidden, and you're going to sound it...sound it so that *she'll* hear. So that *she'll* hear, Michael.

KENLEY (*quietly*): Have you gone quite mad?

OLIVE (*coaxingly*): You'll do it, won't you?...for me? (*Her hands slide up to his shoulders*) M'm?

KENLEY (*removing her hands*): Really, Olive, of all the childish, damn' silly——(*He goes to C.*) Not that I believe you're serious.

OLIVE (*following him*): Of course I'm serious.

KENLEY: But—Good God?—what would you get out of it, anyway? Playing bogies just to scare her!

OLIVE (*lightly—with a faint smile*): What sort of a kick does a cat get out of playing with a mouse, Michael?

KENLEY (*looking at her*): You know, I sometimes wish you wouldn't say things like that.

OLIVE (*impatiently*): Oh—don't *you* go all Pukka Sahib on me, please. That would be too funny...... She's treated me like dirt, hasn't she? She's hurt me, and I want to see her hurt, too.

KENLEY (*a moment's hesitation—then bluntly*): Well, you'll just have to think of some other way, that's all.

OLIVE (*after a moment—coolly*): Shall I? I see. (*A pause, then abruptly*) When Alan comes back, please tell him I've gone to bed. (*Holds out her hand*) Good-bye.

KENLEY (*staring at the hand*): Eh?

OLIVE (*coldly*): I don't suppose I'll see you in the morning before you leave, so I'll say good-bye now. (*As he does not take her hand—letting it fall to her side*) Oh, very well—(*Turns and goes towards the door R.*)

KENLEY (*going after her—as she almost reaches the door*): But I'll be seeing you in Town next week? Thursday, you know.

OLIVE (*still coldly*): I'm not sure; I think perhaps better not.

KENLEY (*blankly*): You—don't mean that? (*She looks at him without speaking*) But, Olive——(*She is still silent—a little panicky edge to his voice now*) Olive, you know you're the one being who means anything to me. You're surely not going to——

OLIVE: And yet, when I ask you to do something for me, something quite tiny...

KENLEY: But something quite mad! (*She shrugs her shoulders and turns as if to go. He grasps her hand*) No, wait! (*Struggling with himself—then giving in—weakly*)—Oh—oh, all right......

OLIVE: What?

KENLEY (*louder*): All right. If you're as set on it as all that...I'll do it—for *you*.

OLIVE (*her expression changing instantly*): Thank

you, Michael. You're sweet. (*Then taking his arm, she leads him Downstage*) For God's sake; be careful no one sees you. Don't bungle it. The drum isn't big, is it? (*He shakes his head*) Then when you've got it, you'd better slip out through one of those little side doors on to the terrace, and down the steps. Keep well in the shadows, mind, and creep along by the side of the lawn till you come to that patch of shrubs. Get well behind them, and not a soul will see you.

KENLEY :......Yes.

OLIVE : I shall go and join them in the library and... view the effect. (*Releasing his arm*) I'm going to enjoy this, Michael. After all, she's been expecting all night to hear the thing : it would be a pity to disappoint her.

KENLEY : And, Olive—things aren't going to be any different between you and me ? They're not, are they ?

OLIVE : Of course not, silly.

[*She leans towards him and kisses him lightly. ALAN comes in R...just in time to see the kiss. He pulls up short, as though every nerve and muscle in his body had suddenly frozen stiff and rigid. They neither of them see him as he stands there, motionless, like an automaton frozen into sudden stillness, in the half-shadow of the doorway...The ensuing short scene must not be taken too quickly. There should be a momentary slow-down of pace, so that the full significance of the situation may sink in.*]

KENLEY : We'll have to be careful, I know ; but we will go on seeing each other—after you're married, I mean ?

OLIVE : Why, of course, Michael. Don't worry.

[*In the doorway,* ALAN *sweeps his hand across his eyes in a dazed, fluttering gesture, as though to brush away the sight.*]

KENLEY : It certainly has been fun, hasn't it—us ?

OLIVE : M'm, m'm.

KENLEY : I'm not going to enjoy it much—thinking of you—with him now.

OLIVE (*jerking her head back—looking up into his face*) : Yo needn't let that worry you. As if a stick like that could ever *really* mean anything to me. All I shall think of is the sound of the money. After all, Michael, you wouldn't have me let a chance like that slip by ?

KENLEY (*with a grin*) : D'you know, Olive, in a way, I could almost feel sorry for him.

[*They kiss again.* ALAN, *as though to steady himself, grasps the lintel of the door and stares, stricken. Then, as though his limbs have suddenly grown weak, he makes a swaying turn, lurches blindly through the doorway, and is gone.*]

OLIVE (*thrusting him from her*) : Ssh ! I thought I heard someone (*They look round and are reassured*) That was mad of us ; if he'd come back just then and caught us...

KENLEY (*teasingly*) : No more bright hopes for you, my pet.

OLIVE : No more anything at all for my sweet, sweet Alan.

KENLEY: You really think you mean so much to him?

OLIVE: I know I do. Isn't it quaint? Singular

KENLEY: Marvellous. (*Stretches out his hand to the cigarette-box on the table*)

OLIVE (*sharply—grasping the hand*): You've no time for that. The drum, my dear, the drum.

KENLEY: Oh, God! Look here. Olive——

OLIVE: Oh, don't start arguing again, *please* (*Gives him a little shove towards the door*) Hurry! Just down the steps and behind those shrubs: you should do it in two minutes. (*Another little shove*) Go on!

KENLEY (*seeing there is no help for it*): All right, all right. (*He goes towards the door R.*)

OLIVE (*hurrying after him—catching hold of his sleeve*): And loud enough to be heard. Michael; but not too loud: it must sound ghostly, remember, very, very ghostly.

KENLEY (*still hanging back*): Seriously, Olive, supposing someone sees me, one of the servants or—

OLIVE: Idiot! You mustn't *let* anyone see you.

KENLEY: But——(*She utters an impatient* "Oh" *and turns away*) Oh, very well, then. But it's your risk, mind. *Your* risk, my dear.

[*He goes out. She stands still for a moment, smiling now, as though at her own thoughts. She turns her head towards the library, and the smile broadens. Then, with a sort of suppressed gaiety, she picks up her skirt and tiptoes to beside the carved chair.*]

OLIVE (*addressing an imaginary person sitting in it*): *Dear* Lady Sarne, you've turned quite pale. Not ill, I hope...Sound? What sound?...A drum?

Why, yes, I can hear something that does sound like a drum! But how odd! What can it be?

[*She breaks off, shaken by a fit of suppressed laughter, and stuffs her handkerchief to her mouth. The library door opens noiselessly and* LORD SARNE *stands in the doorway. He glances round as though surprised at finding her alone, surprise giving way to a look of faint bewilderment at the sight of her shaking shoulders. Then he coughs, Startled, she swings round to face him.*)

OLIVE (*a little gasp*): Oh!—why, Lord Sarne—how you——

LORD SARNE: Please forgive me if I startled you. I was looking for my son, for Alan: I thought I'd find him here.

OLIVE (*taken aback by his sudden appearance—somewhat confused*): No—oh. no—he—went to look for scraf some time ago. He'll back any minute, though.

LORD SARNE: I see. Thank you. (*Turns to go*)

OLIVE (*hurrying towards him*): Oh—I—I was just about to join you and Lady Sarne in the library.

LORD SARNE (*pausing—quite courteously*): My wife has been called away to the telephone——

OLIVE: Oh!

LORD SARNE:— to speak to Ronald. He landed half an hour ago at some place in Wales with a quite unpronouncaeble name. I thought Alan would be glad to know his brother was safe. Perhaps you'll tell him.

OLIVE (*involuntarily*): Then the drum——

LORD SARNE (*quietly*): We may rest assured we shall not hear the drum to-night, Miss Siddall. in Voluntary exp...

OLIVE (*pulling herself together*): No—of course not.

I'll—tell Alan.

LORD SARNE: Thank you. Will you excuse me now? I'd like to have another word with Ronnie, if he's still on the line.

[*He goes out, closing the door behind him. She turns swiftly, as though to dash out through the door R., uttering the name* "Michael!" *in a loud, staccato whisper as she does so. Half-way across the room she pauses, realising the futility of trying to intercept him now. Breathing a* "Damn," *she appears to resign herself to the situation, until, a second later, an idea striking her, she darts out on the terrace and, leaning on the stone wall, peers out over the garden. Once again the loudly whispered* "Michael! Michael!" *There is, of course, no response, and after a moment, she comes back into the room. Frowning, she hesitates; then, with a shrug of the shoulders, goes towards the dresser. And it is just as she reaches it that the sound is first heard: a faint, very faint, roll on a drum, so distant, so remote, as to be scarcely audible. With head uptilted, she stands quite still, listening.*]

OLIVE (*nodding her head—slowly*): Yes...that's fine, Michael, that's fine.

[*The sound increases slightly, but still with such a quality of far-away remoteness that it almost seems to be drifting down into the room from the night sky itself.*]

OLIVE (*a quick spurt of impatience*): Oh, shut up! What's the use of it now, anyway? Shut up, can't you! Shut up!

[*As though in mocking defiance, the sound swells louder. And then the door R. is flung open. The figure that lurches rather than strides into the room is that of* CAPTAIN MICHAEL KENLEY, *a Captain Kenley whose eyes stare fixedly and strangely out of a face that is grey-white and strained. At the sound of the door she has turned. She sees him—the last person she would think to see at this moment, with that distant drum-note still throbbing on, deeper now. and...more menacing? Her eyes dart bewilderedly from him to the open window, then back to him; and suddenly, as though a mask had been clapped over her face, her expression is—fear! The drum-note ceases.*]

OLIVE (*hoarsely—as though her mouth and throat have gone dry*): You? But, who? What does it mean? The drum, Michael, the drum—(*Her voice suddenly pitched higher*) I heard it, I tell you. (*Sinking again to a whisper*) Michael, the drum...(*He comes down to her, swaying into his*) Michael——

KENLEY (*his hands gripping her elbows—jerking the words out*): Listen—I went to the armoury—I couldn't find the light-switch—I stumbled over something in the dark...(*His grip tightening*) Olive, something terrible has happened—for God's sake, don't scream—it's Alan ...He's shot himself.

The drum is heard again. Her lips part, but no sound comes. She can only stare at him, stupidly, dazedly, her jaw hanging loose, as, to the rolling, swelling mutter of the drum—— all her hopes have dashed to the ground.

CURTAIN

AND SO TO WAR

A Satirical Comedy

by

JOE CORRIE

CHARACTERS

A RADIO ANNOUNCER
PAGE-BOY
THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRAY
LORD OTTERBURN
THE RT. HON. BEN BOLT
GRACE MANFUL
SIR PERCY HOLDALL
FANACCI (pronounced *Fannaksi*)
VISCOUNT VESTER
SOLDIERS

AND SO TO WAR

SCENE: *A studio in the radio station of Disneyana. It is a study in black and white with a black-and-white picture of the dictator Fanacci prominent. On a little platform at back, with two steps up to it, is the chair of the dictator. The furnishings are simple; a table which holds the tone controls, etc., a couch, a chair here and there, and the microphone. There is only one entrance, a door at left, over which is the red light. The carpet on the floor is a black and white one.*

When the curtain rises, the ANNOUNCER *sits in a chair fast asleep. He is immaculately dressed in black and white, and wears hornrimmed, spectacles of an extra large size.*

From a loud-speaker somewhere we hear the strains of a dance band.

The door opens suddenly and a smart little PAGE-BOY *enters, wearing a black-and-white uniform. He clicks his heels smartly, looks up at the picture of Fanacci, and gives the salute, which is by putting a thumb in each ear and spreading out the fingers. Then he takes an official document of black and white from the little bag at his side, produces a whistle from his pocket and blows a shrill blast.*

The ANNOUNCER *wakens, quite unperturbed, as if this was a common thing to him.*

PAGE: To be broadcast immediately, sir.

[*He hands the document to the* ANNOUNCER, *gives*

the salute, turns smartly, and goes off. The ANNOUNCER *opens the document in a graceful manner, adjusts his spectacles, coughs very politely, rises to adjust his tie at the mirror, then goes to the microphoe ncontrol-knobs and presses a button which rings a bell somewhere. While the music fades out he goes to the microphone, and how he caresses it, as if it were his only love. He speaks the real Oxford English, and his pronunciation is faultless.*]

ANNOUNCER (*into the microphone, speaking in the official tone*): Excuse me breaking into this programme of dance music, but grave news has just come to hand. The dispute between this country of Disneyana and the country of Lilliput has reached a crisis. Our minister for foreign affairs, Sir Eustace Dumkluk, who, as you all know, has had to shave off his moustache for health reasons, has been accused by the king of Lilliput of being barefaced. A grave tension now exists between the two countries and war is imminent. (*He coughs politely*) Excuse me...As this has been planned—I beg your pardon—as this has been expected, we are bringing to the microphone with all possible haste the Archbishop of Bray; Lord Otterburn, the chief of the National Newspaper Syndicate; The Right Honourable Benjam n Bolt, the leader of the trade unions; Miss Grace Manful of the Women's League of Justice, Freedom, Equality, Health, Beauty, Deportment, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera; Sir Percival Holdall of Amalgamated Banks, and Viscount Vester of Amalgamated Industries. The pronouncement will be made by your dictator—Fanacci! (*Trumpets*

sound) We will now take you back to Spurlington Spa to hear dance music by Billy Bunting and his Jazz Rag Tags......Goo'-bye for now.

[*He touches the button and the dance programme resumes.*

He folds the document very carefully, combs his moustache, sits down in a direct line with his trousers, and polishes his nails.

PAGE-BOY *enters, salutes as before, then shouts.*]

PAGE: His Grace, the Archbishop of Bray!

[*The* ARCHBISHOP *enters. He is a fat man in the robes of his Church, white with black edging, and wearing a black cross. He puffs and blows painfully.*

The ANNOUNCER *rises to meet him.* PAGE-BOY *salutes and goes off.*]

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the studio, your Grace.

ARCHBISHOP: Confounded nuisance being summoned here at such short notice. A minute later and I would have been in my bath—providing the pipes are still running. (*Puffs and blows*) And who is that confounded lift of yours still out of order?

ANNOUNCER: No money, your Grace, the army gets it all these days.

ARCHBISHOP: Yes, the army! the army! the army! but never the Church. (*He sits on the couch, still puffing*) What have I to say into this microphone?

ANNOUNCER: That has to be discussed yet, your Grace. But Fanacci will tell you just what to say.

ARCHBISHOP: Then why am I here if I have just to say what I'm told?

ANNOUNCER: I'm afraid you'll have to ask me another, your Grace.

ARCHBISHOP: Does he expect me to pronounce for war?

ANNOUNCER: I find that the word peace is not in our new dictionary, your Grace.

ARCHBISHOP: Then I refuse. Our people want peace.

ANNOUNCER: The people have no say in the matter, your Grace. Fanacci is the law, and what he says must be obeyed.

ARCHBISHOP: It is my duty as a servant of Christ, the great Peacemaker, to advise and pray against war.

ANNOUNCER: Yep!...

ARCHBISHOP: I have been hearing strange rumours about Fanacci—(*looks round furtively*) our beloved Fanacci.

ANNOUNCER: Strange rumours, your Grace?

ARCHBISHOP: Yes, that he is behaving in strange ways!

ANNOUNCER: He is a dictator, that is all.

ARCHBISHOP: He has even been heard to laugh.

ANNOUNCER: He has more time now to joke, your Grace.

ARCHBISHOP: There's something wrong with a Dictator when he acts like a human being.

ANNOUNCER: Perhaps he ought to get married, your Grace.

[PAGE-BOY *enters. He salutes as before.*]

PAGE: Lord Otterburn!

[OTTERBURN *enters like a whirlwind, carrying a bundle of newspapers—the Press personified. He plumps the newspapers on the table.*]

OTTERBURN (*quickly and curtly*): Good day!

ARCHBISHOP and ANNOUNCER (*together*): Good day, your Lordship.

OTTERBURN (*to* ANNOUNCER): Why aren't the others here ?

ANNOUNCER: They have all been summoned, your Lordship.

OTTERBURN: Get them here at once, I have no time to waste !

ANNOUNCER: Certainly, your Lordship.

[*The* ANNOUNCER *goes off gracefully*.]

OTTERBURN: We put a Dictator in power to speed things up, didn't we ?

ARCHBISHOP (*rather tired*): I suppose so.

OTTERBURN: And here I am, two minutes already passed with nothing to do. ME! Chief of Amalgamated Newspapers! By gad! I'll have something to say about this when the opportunity arrives. By gad! (*He would say something but glances round suspiciously; quickly to the* ARCHBISHOP) Is it peace or war with you ?

ARCHBISHOP: The Church always stands for peace.

OTTERBURN (*not at all friendly*): Yes, always—the *next* time. Look here, there's going to be no war. And I say it! ME! The chief of Amalgamated Newspapers. The people don't want a war, and I'm seeing that they don't get it. (*Quicker*) The country still bleeds from the last war; we've had enough full stop!

ARCHBISHOP: He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.

OTTERBURN: Yes, and when George Washington said that he was right...What is there in that goddam country of Lilliput that we should spill the blood of

Disneyana to possess? I'm going to fight against this war to the last ditch. (*Dramatically*) To save the youth of my country I am prepared to spill the last drop of my *ink*!

(*And he hits the table with his fist.*)

Where stands the Church?

ARCHBISHOP: With the Press—always.

OTTERBURN: Between us we can prevent war.

ARCHBISHOP: There are the Banks, my Lord, the Trade Unions, Amalgamated Industries, and the Woman's League of this, that, and the other thing.

OTTERBURN: But I am—*the Press*!

[PAGE-BOY *enters and salutes as before.*]

PAGE: The Right Honourable Benjamin Bolt!

[*Ben enters, the typical Trade Union leader in his heavy tweed suit, sturdy boots, and sturdy silver chain across his chest. He is getting grey now, but still as sturdy as ever. He walks into the room confidently and with a look of defiance on his face. He speaks with an accent. Exit* PAGE-BOY.]

BEN: Well, here we are again.

OTTERBURN (*quickly and sharply*): What is it with you, peace or war?

BEN (*meaning to nip the rose in the bud*): When you ask the question civilly, Ottie, old boy, you'll get your answer civilly. Don't forget that you're speaking to the head of the Trade Union movement, which is ten millions strong. (*Thumbs in his vest, and looking at the* ARCHBISHOP) I've been known as honest Ben Bolt all my life, and honest Ben Bolt I will be until the end. That's me! (*To* OTTERBURN) Peace!!

OTTERBURN: You stood for peace before the last war, but when war *did* come you couldn't get hold of a big drum and a cocked hat quick enough to lure the lads to the slaughter.

BEN: And I seem to recollect being boosted by the Otterburn Press, eh! (*To* ARCHBISHOP) What about you?

ARCHBISHOP: Christ has always stood for peace.

BENJAMIN: Oh, Christ has always been all right. But I seem to recollect the Archbishop of Bray blessing the troops before battle and offering up prayers for the enemy's destruction.

OTTERBURN (*To* BEN): Do you stand for peace this time—at all costs?

BEN: Haven't we had enough bloody war?

OTTERBURN: I'm accustomed to getting straight answer to straight questions.

BEN (*getting nearer to him, confidently*): Look here, Otterburn, you may be king of the castle at your office, but remember that you're speaking to Ben Bolt, the secretary of the Trade Union movement of this country--honest Ben Bolt, who, as a nipper, worked in Holsworth Colliery—rose from the depths to the heights, see! Because he has it in here. (*Touches his temple with his forefinger*) And he's standing dictatorship from nobody (*looks round quickly*) but Fanacci. And I'm here with a warning to you, Otterburn. If you dare to advocate war in your press to-morrow, the wheels of your printing-presses will stop before midday.

OTTERBURN: So you've forgotten the last strike already, have you?

BEN : No, we have *learned.* The workers of this country are against war, and without the workers your war goes phut, see ! (*To* ARCHBISHOP) Am I right or am I wrong ?

ARCHBISHOP : He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.

BEN : And when Karl Marx said that you can depend it is right...Huh ! The sooner you two realise that you're dealing with a man that is different the better it'll be for everybody. (*Loudly*) With ten million workers at my back ready to obey my word...

OTTERBURN : Sh ! sh ! There's no need for that kind of talk, Bolt. You're here to demand peace, so am I, and so is our friend, the Archbishop.

BEN : Huh ! I knew I would make you see the light. Ten million workers, Otterburn, at my command. And you know what that means to my enemies. One word in favour of war to-night and—(*Significantly*) You're telling me. Huh !

[PAGE-BOY *enters as before.*]

PAGE : Miss Grace Manful !

[GRACE *enters. She is mannish in dress, wearing spectacles, and carrying a few pamphlets in her hand. She stands just inside door.* PAGE-BOY *goes off.*]

BEN : Oh, hullo, Gracie ! Still travelling for the Mothers' Union ?

GRACE (*after a slight pause*) :......On behalf of the mothers of the world I say, NO-MORE-WAR !

BEN : And could you stop it if it came to pass ?

GRACE : The women of the world will rise up in arms.

BEN : Yes, and go into the streets with their white feathers if the Otterburn Press asked them to.

GRACE: The women never forget. The last war was to end all war, and by God!—(*to* ARCHBISHOP)—by gum, we will see that the promises are kept.

BEN (*in a fatherly way*): Gracie, my girl, you're safe enough this time; the workers, represented by me, stand for peace at all costs. So you can go home just now if you like and sleep soundly.

GRACE (*bitterly*): Yes, go home and sleep soundly while your workers are working over-time making munitions and poison gas. Why do you wait till war *comes* before you try to stop it? Why don't you tell your men not to make munitions? Why don't you refuse to man the ships that carry the war materials across the seas? Why don't you advocate to your workers not to join the Army and the Navy? Can you tell me that, Honest the Right Honourable Benjamin Bolt?

BEN: Oh, you want to know *that*, do you?

GRACE: On behalf of the mothers of the world, I *do*!

BEN: Then I'll tell you.

OTTERBURN (*to* BEN): I'll give you a hundred guineas for a three thousand word reply to that question.

BEN (*incredulous*): A hundred!

OTTERBURN (*who thinks his offer is being spurned*): I'll make it two hundred.

BEN (*to* GRACE): You'll get my answer in the *Daily Bluff*.

GRACE (*to* OTTERBURN): You'll state that it is a reply to *my* question, Lord Otterbrun?

OTTERBURN: If you wish it.

GRACE: It shall be honoured. I'll send along my very best photo in the morning.

[PAGE-BOY *enters.*]

PAGE: Sir Percival Holdall!

BEN: Ah, the mouthpiece of the banks. Now we shall see who's master! Now we shall see who's the boss of the country (*To* GRACE) Watch me put him in his proper place.

(*Enter* SIR PERCY, *immaculately dressed and holding his pince-nez in his fingers, attached to a cord round his neck. He cultivates a short-pointed beard, which is wearing grey. Exit* PAGE-BOY.)

SIR PERCY: Dear me! Am I late? I had to call a hurried meeting of my directors.

OTTERBURN (*desperately*): Time, time! My precious time being frittered away.

SIR PERCY: I'm so sorry.

OTTERBURN: The country will hear of this. I tell you my leading articles to-morrow will deal with incompetence, ineptitude, instability, intolerance, and insanity in high places. (*He turns his back on them and stands madly trembling.*)

BEN (*to* SIR PERCY): Well, Percy, what is it with you? Peace or war?

SIR PERCY: I shall be with the majority, Bolt.

BEN: Oh, shall ye? There's only one question I'm going to ask *you*. Can you wage a war without the workers?

SIR PERCY: My dear Bolt, I would rather not inveigle myself in an argument with you. I don't wish to be humiliated in such distinguished company.

BEN: Ha! and I guess you'd be out for the count in the first two minutes. (*To each in turn*) I've been educated in the hard and bitter school of experience.

and what I don't know politics and finance—I said finance, Sir Percy—isn't worth anybody's while learning. When I was a boy working in the darkness of the Holsworth Colliery, a nipper this size, I said to myself, "Hold on, Ben, my boy, hold on and be patient. Stick into your studies and some day you'll be a force in the land. God has putten ye on the face of this earth for something, and that something is to lead your fellow-workers out of the wilderness, as Moses led the people of old. There is only one enemy you have to fight, lad, and never forget it, only one enemy, the capitalist class. (*With emphasis on the s's*) But the day will come when they will be forced to fear and respect you."

OTTERBURN (*his hands in the air*): Oh, gad, have we to be here for ever? (*But no one is paying any attention to him now; in fact, the* ARCHBISHOP *has settled down on the couch and might go to sleep soon.*)

BEN (*to* SIR PERCY): Has my prophecy come true or not?

SRI PERCY: We certainly respect you, Bolt.

ARCHBISHOP: There's no one doubts the right honourable gentleman's honesty, Sir Percy.

BEN (*to* GRACE): I hope you have the brains to notice that I spoke right here, in the middle of them, the capitalist class. I calls that courage.

GRACE: But surely there are times when you can forget your class war, and respect the feelings of others?

BEN: There you are, showing the white feather already. (*With his thumbs in his vest*) Look here, all of you. (OTTERBURN, *with a groan, walks the floor.* SIR PERCY *is faintly amused. The* ARCHBISHOP *utters a slight snore.* GRACE *powders her nose.*) I'm going to tell you

here and now, straight to your faces—I'm a socialist! I believe in a world ruled by the workers for the workers. I believed that when I was a nipper in the depths of Holsworth Colliery, and I believe it to-day now that I am the leader of ten million workers.

GRACE: Yep! And for that you were decorated by our late President?

BEN: I was decorated because—(*Turns quickly to* OTTERBURN) How much for three thousand words for your *Evening Slush*?

OTTERBURN (*not very interested*): Same as before.

BEN (*to* GRACE): You'll get my answer in the *Evening Slush*.

GRACE (*to* OTTERBURN): I shall send two photos, Lord Otterburn. Thank you *so* much.

SIR PERCY: Just how do we stand in this crisis, gentlemen?

OTTERBURN (*quickly, sharply and angrily*): Peace!

ARCHBISHOP: Amen!

BEN (*to* SIR PERCY): When I say peace, Sir Percy, it means peace.

SRI PERCY (*thoughtfully*): Yes we cannot risk another war so soon. Our people haven't had time to forget.

BEN (*astonished*): What! are *you* for peace?

SRI PERCY: I am, most sincerely. (*To* OTTERBURN) We cannot risk it, Otterburn. Foreign opinion would be all against us.

GRACE (*very pleased with this*): And when the banks say there shall be peace, there *shall* be peace.

BEN: When I says there shall be peace the banks can say what they damn's well like. When I was a nipper

in the bowels of the earth, a youngster this size——

OTTERBURN (*to* SIR PERCY) : But where does Fanacci stand in this affair ?

SIR PRECY : Doesn't even the Press know, Otterburn ?

BEN : Does it matter where he stands when I stand for peace ?

GRACE : Why do *you* agree to a Dictator, Benjamin ?

BEN : Do I ?

GRACE : Well, I haven't heard of any protest from you or your ten million workers.

BEN : Oh, that ! I see. You want to know—(*To* OTTERBURN) Anything doing for the *Weekly Watchword* ?

OTTERBURN : No !

BEN (*to* GRACE) : Then I'll tell you, it's because...

SIR PERCY (*interrupting*) : Is it advisable to say anything on the matter here, Bolt ? Walls have ears you know.

BEN : Walls make no difference to me. I'm Honest Ben Bolt—the Right Honourable Ben Bolt, and what I say I say, no matter what the walls are made of. I'll tell ye why we suffer the fool...(*pause*) Good God, I wonder if that microphone is switched off !...(*to* GRACE) Come round to my flat to-night and I'll tell ye.

GRACE : Your flat ! And where is your wife ?

BEN : At home in Holsworth.

GRACE : And we would be alone in your flat. No thank you.

BEN : What would be wrong with that ? Oh, I see. Some of you women give me the pip, you do, the

absolute pip. You with all your talk of "isms" and putting your finger to your nose at public opinion, and.. bah ? (*To the others*) Women will never get us anywhere...all the brains they have they sit on them. (*To* GRACE) I'll save my breath for the microphone. I'm going to make the speech of my life through his thing to-night. See if I don't. (*Structs over to the mike and speaks into it with some flourish.*) Comrades. (*To* GRACE) No ladies and gentlemen for me. I'm going to speak to my own class...Comrades, this is Ben Bolt speaking, your own Ben—the Right Honourable who was once a nipper...

[PAGE-BOY *enters.*]

PAGE : Fanacci !

[BEN *steps back from the microphone in double-quick time. The others stand at attention immediately. Trumpets sound. Then* FANACCI *enters to the martial strains of "Three Blind Mice." Everyone stands at attention giving the salute.*

FANACCI *marches to his chair, gives the salute, and then bends. The others do the same.* PAGE-BOY, *after giving the bend, salutes again and goes out.* FANACCI *is dressed in black and white military uniform, a typical dictator of middle age.*]

FANACCI : All here ?

SIR PERCY : Viscount Vester is still to come, your Highness.

FANACCI : We cannot wait, even for a Viscount. (*To* OTTERBURN) Peace or war ?

OTTERBURN : Every letter of my press and every drop of my ink...

FANACCI (*madly*) : Peace or war ?

OTTERBURN (*very mildly*) : Peace.

FANACCI (*to* BEN) : Peace or war ?

BEN : As secretary of the Trade Union movement of this country, and with ten million...

FANACCI (*madly*) : Peace or war ?

BEN (*quietly*) : Peace.

FANACCI (*to* GRACE) : Peace or war ?

GRACE : On behalf of the mothers of the world and the mothers to be...

FANACCI : Peace or war ?

GRACE (*with a smile*) : Peace, your Highness.

FANACCI (*to* SIR PERCY) : You ?

SIR PERCY : Peace, your Highness.

ARCHBISHOP : Amen !

FANACCI : With which I entirely agree.

BEN : Hear ! Hear !

FANACCI : Silence ! (*Claps his hands loudly. The* ANNOUNCER *enters like a shot out of a gun*) The mike —that I may speak to the world !

[ANNOUNCER *hurries to the button.*]

(To ANNOUNCER) Half a mo' till I tell the Archbishop a funny story. (*He invites them all to gather round him. To the* ARCHBISHOP) Three blind mice, see how they run ; they all run after the farmer's wife, who cut off their tails with a carving knife. All together...Did ever you see such a thing in your life...three—blind—mice !

[*They all, including the* ANNOUNCER, *repeat the three last words in unison with him, while he conducts the choir with his hands. Laughing loudly and strangely*] Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! He ! he ! he ! Ho ! ho ! ho ! (*Suddenly becoming serious*). The mike ! (*Trumpets*

sound. The ANNOUNCER *switches on. The red light goes on, and* FANACCI *steps forward to the microphone, again to the blare of trumpets, and "Three Blind Mice.")*

ANNOUNCER (*into the microphone*) : Ladies and gentlemen—FANACCI !

[*Trumpets—pause.*]

FANACCI : People !

[PAGE-BOY *enters.*]

PAGE : Viscount Vester !

[VISCOUNT VESTER *enters quickly and holds up his hand.*]

VISCOUNT VESTER : STOP !

[FANACCI *turns arrogantly, but after a moment admits defeat.*]

FANACCI : Switch off !

ANNOUNCER : Owing to a slight technical hitch over which we have no control the voice of your beloved Fanacci will be heard later. Sorry for interrupting the dance music. Goo'-bye for now—Goo' bye. (*He switches off.*)

FANACCI : Well ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : I think I have a say in this matter your Highness.

FANACCI : Then let it be brief ! Is it peace or war ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : War ! ! (*This causes consternation. They all protest, drowning each other. The* ANNOUNCER *slips out gladly.*

(*During a lull*) Can I have order, please ?

FANACCI : ORDER ! (*Sudden and complete silence*).

BEN : As the mouthpiece of ten million workers, and one who has risen from the depths of hell to the height of...

OTTERBURN (*interrupting like a shot*): Damned nonsense! Look here, Vester, the people of this country don't want a war. I tell you, my public...

GRACE (*interrupting in a screaming voice*): We will refuse to let our men go. We will refuse to love them! ...(*She finishes with a wild scream.* FANACCI, *to their astonishment, laughs uproariously. He stops his laugh suddenly and wears his serious look.*)

VESTER (*to* FANACCI): You're quite well, I hope, your Highness?

FANACCI: Quite well, thank you. To business! The world waits.

BEN (*to* VISCOUNT VESTER): You diddled us into the last war, Vester, you representing Amalgamated Industries, with your munitions and poison gas and oil, but...

OTTERBURN (*interrupting*): My readers wish peace, they will have no more bloodshed. I tell you...

BEN (*to* OTTERBURN): One at a time, Ottie, one at a time! I'm the mouthpiece of ten million..

[FANACCI *begins to laugh as before, and stops just as suddenly.*]

FANACCI: Business! Business!

ARCHBISHOP: He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.

BEN (*to* FANACCI): Can't you take a vote and settle this matter, your Highness?

VISCOUNT VESTER: The vote will be taken when I say so.

BEN: Who's dictator here, you or...his Highness?

VISCOUNT VESTER: Neither: Wealth is a dictator, and I am its chief spokesman.

BEN: Who put our dictator in power?

OTTERBURN: The *Press*.

VISCOUNT VESTER: And who owns the Press?

OTTERBURN (*quietly*): Amalgamated Industries.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Then am I not your master?

OTTERBURN: But the people wish for peace.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Then prepare them for war.

SIR PERCY: The Banks will never agree to a war.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Who owns the Banks?

SIR PERCY (*quietly*): Amalgamated Industries.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Oppose me then if you dare!

(*There is a slight pause.* OTTERBURN *and* SIR PERCY *meet to discuss the matter.*)

ARCHBISHOP (*to* VESTER): You have forgotten the Church, Viscount Vester.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Who owns the soul of the Church?

ARCHBISHOP: The State.

VISCOUNT VESTER: And the state is ruled by Amalgamated Industries.

ARCHBISHOP: But Christ stands for peace.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Christ has nothing to do with the Church. (*Deliberately*) I am the Master!

BEN: I'll deal with him. (*Approaching* VISCOUNT VESTER) Look here, Vester you won't bully me. My workers stand solidly by me, and I have the power to put you in your proper place. I will call a general strike at midnight.

VISCOUNT VESTER (*knowing well that* BEN *is a danger to him*): Look here, Bolt. I don't want to quarrel with you.

BEN: It'll pay you not to quarrel with me, Vester.

appeal to his intelligence

VISCOUNT VESTER (*in a kindly manner*): I know you're a decent chap and as honest as the day is long, Ben. And you never come to a decision without reasoning things out, do you ?

BEN: Has it ever been said that Honest Ben Bolt doesn't listen to all parties and bring his judgment to bear on every aspect of the problem ?

VISCOUNT VESTER: The whole world knows that Ben.

BEN: Well, why do you want war ?

VISCOUNT VESTER: For the sake of my country.

BEN: Did you say country or company ?

VISCOUNT VESTER: My country. I am proud of Disneyana, Bolt, but we must have expansion; either that or we go the way of past nations. In other words, it is either war or death.

VISCOUNT VESTER: I am a patriot. There is no country under the sun to compare with Disneyana.

OTTERBURN: By God! there isn't.

SIR PERCY: 'Tis true, 'tis ture.

ARCHBISHOP: 'Tis God's own country.

VISCOUNT VESTER: But to save it we must fight...

BEN: You can't put this across me, Vester. It has been the justification of war since the days of Adam and Eve, and I'm not going to waste any more words. Another mention of war and every wheel belonging to Amalgamated Industries stops at midnight.

VISCOUNT VESTER: Wheels can stop without your order, Ben.

BEN: Ah, you mean a lock-out, eh ?

VISCOUNT VESTER: No. I mean something far more serious. Unless we can get hold of the oil fields of

Lilliput Amalgamated Industries will have to close down. Another three months as we are going and every working man in the country will be unemployed.

BEN: Bluff.

VISCOUNT VESTER: I wish it was. God is my witness. I am dead serious. Three months of this and our beloved country will be in ruins, in ruins, Bolt!

OTTERBURN: Yes, the truth must come out.

BEN: You honestly mean this? Things are as bad as you say?

VISCOUNT VESTER: I wish that I could say "No," Ben.

BEN (*to* OTTERBURN): Did you know of this?

OTTERBURN: The Press knows all.

BEN (*to* SIR PERCY): Did you?

SIR PERCY: The banks are always well informed.

BEN (*to* ARCHBISHOP): What would Christ have done in a case like this?

ARCHBISHOP: Christianity has nothing to do with politics.

BEN: Then why was I kept in the dark?...Let me know all.

VISCOUNT VESTER: You love the working class, Ben?

BEN: I would die for my comrades.

VISCOUNT VESTER: And we all admire you for it.

ARCHBISHOP: Amen!

VISCOUNT VESTER: I respect a fellow who has definite opinions. You and I are leaders of opposing forces, Ben.

BEN: Dead enemies.

VISCOUNT VESTER: My class cannot live witout your class.

BEN : Hear ! Hear !

VISCOUNT VESTER : And your class connot live without my class.

BEN : That's where we differ.

VISCOUNT VESTER : What will happen if I close down my industries to-morrow ?

BEN : You wouldn't dare do that.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Ten million men suddenly plunged into starvation. What will that mean, Bolt ?

BEN : It means revolution—bloody revolution.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Exactly. But when it comes through industry being dead, who is the revloution going to be against ? Where will it lead ? Who will be the victims ?

OTTERBURN : That is the question.

BEN (*desperately*) : But the last war...you said the same thing, and it was all a fraud. The workers won't believe this story again.

OTTERBURN : The workers believe the Press implicitly.

SIR PERCY : Praise be to God !

ARCHBISHOP : Amen.

BEN (*to* ARCHBISHOP) : Can the Church do nothing ?

ARCHBISHOP : There shall be wars and rumour of wars.

VISCOUNT VESTER : I thank you, Archbishop.

BEN : But I cannot say "War" to my workers !

VISCOUNT VESTER : Tell them it is to make Disneyana a country fit for heroes to live in.

GRACE : I don't believe this story. No more babies ! No more babies !

[FANACCI *blows a whistle and soldiers in black and white uniforms enter quickly.*]

FANACCI : Put her in the padded cell.

(*They bear her away. She screams* "No more babies" *till out of hearing.*)

BEN : You'll never get reason out of a woman. My old woman is the only one I ever met that had any real sense. Now, my old woman, Vester, is one of the kind that listens to me, knowing that she's listening to sense.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Which reminds me, Ben...You're getting near the age when you'll have to go to make room for a younger man.

BEN : Isn't there a move going on already behind the scene ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : I know. But why wait. Haven't you given enough for the workers ?

BEN : No man can give enough for the workers. They may chuck me out, but my heart will always be with them, thank God.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Which makes me proud of you, Ben.

SIR PERCY : Hear ! Hear !

VISCOUNT VESTER : But what will happen when you must retire ?

BEN : Ah, dear knows, Vester, dear knows. I'm afraid of that day coming.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Ben, the workers need a man like you to look after their interests in the House of Peers.

BEN : The House of Peers ! Me ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : Why not ?

BEN : Oh, there's no reason why. I guess I'd look as well there as anyone. (*To others*) That's one thing about Honest Ben Bolt, he can mix with both high and low and never gee his blinking ginger.

VISCOUNT VESTER : Viscount Bolt of Holsworth.

BEN : Me, you mean ?

OTTERBURN : From pit boy to peer.

BEN : What a title for a book. (*To* VISCOUNT VESTER) Old Kate, that's my wife, would be Lady Bolt ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : And doesn't she deserve it ?

BEN : God knows she does. Through thick and thin she has stooden by me, through pit and through Parliament, through ups and through downs. Poor old Kate, she will cry her eyes out when she hears about this...It's O. K. about the ruination of the country, of course. You swear that ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : With my hand up to God.

BEN : I knew it, of course, I knew it. But I never lets even the truth go without a fight.

(VISCOUNT VESTER *addresses* FANACCI.)

VISCOUNT VESTER : I think we can safely take the vote now, your Highness.

FANACCI : Hands up for peace ?

(*No hands*).

Hands up for war ?

(*All hands go up.* FANACCI *claps his hands, and* ANNOUNCER *enters.*)

(*To* ANNOUNCER) The mike ! You will speak first, Bolt. Then you, Otterburn ; you next, Percy ; then you, Archbishop ; followed by Viscount Vester. Then I...I shall give the command !

(*Trumpets sound. The* ANNOUNCER *presses the button, and the red light goes on. He goes to the microphone.*)

ANNOUNCER: I must apologise for being thirteen and two-thirds minutes late, but it was due to circumstances entirely beyound our control. We have at the microphone the Right Honourable Benjamin Bolt, who will speak to you on the crisis...The Right Honourable Benjamin Bolt.

[ANNOUNCER *steps back and* BEN *goes forward.*]

BEN (*slowly and seriously*): Com-er-ades. A crisis has come upon us. For three sleepless days and nights I have been going into the whole situation. And I venture to tell you that the situation is—indeed—grave. Honest Ben Bolt admits that the situation is—indeed—grave. All that you hold dear in this life, Com-er-ades, your homes, your wives, your children, your sweethearts, are in danger. How deep is that danger I am hardly bold enough to tell. But the truth must come out...Your country is on the verge of bankruptcy. Unless we can get expansion in Lilliput—well, you can take it from me that we'll be in the clutches of the international pawnbrokers within three months. Com-er-rades, you know how I hate war. But there has come a time when we've got to love it! Your country must be saved, and that can only be done by war. Rally, Com-er-rades, rally to Disneyana and prosperity. You have nothing to lose but your chains, and you have a whole world to gain.

[*He steps back.*]

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen—Lord Otterburn.

[OTTERBURN *steps forward.*]

OTTERBURN : Readers...The Press of Disneyana is known and respected throughout the world for its honesty and veracity. So when I find myself on the same platform as Honest Ben Bolt, I know that God is with me. To-morrow my headlines will be : " United we stand, divided we fall." Rally to Disneyana, rally to the cause of justice and truth, and victory is ours.

[*He steps back.*]

ANNOUNCER : Ladies and gentlemen—Sir Percival Holdall.

[SIR PERCY *steps forward.*]

SIR PERCY : Working men and women of Disneyana, your savings are in danger. Only a united and a successful war can protect your hard-earned savings. Is not the protection of the sayings of the poor the greatest test that can come to a nation ? Shall it be said in the history of the future that we betrayed the careful poor ? Not, a thousand times no. Rally to Disneyana in this hour of danger. Follow your leader, Ben Bolt, for who is greater among you ? If we are united we cannot fail. Remembar your savings.

FANACCI : Enough !...Enough !......I shall speak now ! (*He steps forward to the microphone, while the trumpets sound.*)

ANNOUNCER : Ladies and gentlmen—Fanacci !

[*Trumpets.*]

FANACCI : My call is to *war* ! (*Trumpets*) Greece and Rome shall die, but Disneyana shall never die ! (*Trumpets*) I have but one decree, and it must be obeyed. (*Pause*) The youth of Disneyana is too

precious to lose in this war. (*The others look at each other perplexed*) Therefore I decree that no man under fifty shall bear arms. (*The others are stunned*) No—man—under—fifty—shall—go—to war. (*Consternation and a mad cackling by the others*). SILENCE ! And all men with over £500 a year shall lead the van.

[*Trumpets. Then we hear the cheering of the multitudes in the public square.* FANACCI *clicks his heels and marches out to acknowledge their cheers. The music is "Colonel Bogey."*]

VISCOUNT VESTER (*huskily*) : He is mad !......The man is mad !

OTTERBURN : God, that means us !

ARCHBISHOP : I heard he was mad !......I heard he was mad !

BEN : Listen how the workers are cheering......Oh, he knew how to win them......he knew how to diddle us. I can't go to war—I've got a bad liver !......I've got flat feet !......I've got gallstones......lumbago....rheumatism !

VISCOUNT VESTER : I wonder if he *is* mad......He had all this planned knowing he had the people in the hallow of his hands.

OTTERBURN : We are powerless now ; he has the multitude with him.

SIR PERCY : We are helpless......helpless.

[*Trumpets sound, cheering is heard loudly.* FANACCI *returns.*]

FANACCI : The time has come to save your country. Be true to your words. Be patriots. Your country calls you !

VISCOUNT VESTER : Who is master here ?

FANACCI : *I* am master ! Too long has the world been led by men like you, who call on the multitudes to make the sacrifice, but make none yourself. Now is your chance to prove that you are not liars and hypocrites and traitors to humanity.

BEN : I've only got one kidney and it's on the wrong side. I cannot go......I tell you I'm C5.

OTTERBURN : Who is going to run the Press if you take me ?

FANACCI : *I* shall run the Press.

SIR PERCY : Who will run the banks ?

FANACCI : *I* shall run the banks ?

BEN : Who will run the Trades Unions ?

VISCOUNT VESTER : Who will run the Amalgamated Industries ?

FANACCI : *I Fanacci* ! I shall run the Amalgamated Industries ! ! FALL IN ! ! !

[*Trumpets. Soldiers enter.*]

About turn ! Left dress !

[*They stand awkwardly at attention. Soldier dresses them into a line of a sort.*]

FANACCI : Left turn ! Quick march !

[*They are marched out, a very awkward squad, to the tune of "Colonel Bogey", trumpets, and the cheering of the multitudes.* FANACCI, *who has been laughing uproariously at this, stops suddenly when they are all through the door. Then he puts on his Dictator look again. Slowly and deliberately he puts his right hand to his left breast, and stands there, like the pictures of Napoleon while the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

THE DEAR DEPARTED

A Comedy

by

STANLEY HOUGHTON

CHARACTERS

MRS. SLATER MRS. JORDAN	sisters
HENRY SLATER BEN JORDAN	their husbands

VICTORIA SLATER—a girl of ten

ABEL MERRYWEATHER

The action takes place in a provincial town on a Saturday afternoon

THE DEAR DEPARTED

The scene is the sitting-room of a small house in a lower middle-class district of a provincial town. On the spectator's left is the window, with the blinds down. A sofa is in front of it. On his right is a fire-place with an armchair by it. In the middle of the wall facing the spectator is the door into the passage. To the left of the door a cheap, shabby chest of drawers, to the right a sideboard. In the middle of the room is the table, with chairs round it. Ornaments and a cheap American clock are on the mantelpiece, in the hearth a kettle. By the sideboard a pair of gaudy new carpet slippers. The table is partly laid for tea, and the necessaries for the meal are on the sideboard, as also are copies of an evening paper and of "Tit Bits" and "Pearson's Weekly." Turning to the left through the door takes you to front door; to the right, upstairs. In the passage a hat-stand is visible.

When the curtain rises MRS. SLATER *is seen laying the table. She is a vigorous, plump, red-faced vulgar woman, prepared to do any amount of straight talking to get her own way. She is in black, but not in complete mourning. She listens a moment and then goes to the window, opens it and calls into the street.*

MRS. SLATER (*sharply*): Victoria, Victoria! D'ye hear? Come in, will you?

[MRS. SLATER *closes window and puts the blind straight and then returns to her work at the table.* VICTORIA, *a precocious girl of ten, dressed in colours, enters.*]

MRS. SLATER: I'm amazed at you, Victoria; I really am. How can you be gallivanting about in the street with your grandfather lying dead and cold upstairs I don't know. Be off now, and change your dress before your Aunt Elizabeth and your Uncle Ben come. It would never do for them to find you in colours.

VICTORIA: What are they coming for? They haven't been here for ages.

MRS. SLATER: They're coming to talk over poor Grandpa's affairs. Your father sent them a telegram as soon as we found he was dead. (*A noise is heard.*) Good gracious, that's never them. (MRS. SLATER *hurries to the door and opens it.*) No, thank goodness! it's only your father.

[HENRY SLATER, *a stooping, heavy man with a drooping moustache, enters. He is wearing a black tail coat, grey trousers, a black tie, and a bowler hat. He carries a little paper parcel.*]

HENRY: Not come yet, eh?

MRS. SLATER: You can see they haven't, can't you? Now, Victoria, be off upstairs and that quick. Put your white frock on with a black sash.

[VICTORIA *goes out.*]

MRS. SLATER (*to* HENRY): I'm not satisfied, but it's the best we can do till our new black's ready, and Ben and Elizabeth will never have thought about mourning yet, so we'll outshine them there. (HENRY *sits in the*

armchair by the fire.) Get your boots off, Henry; Elizabeth's that paying she notices the least speck of dirt.

HENRY: I'm wondering if they'll come at all. When you and Elizabeth quarrelled she said she'd never set foot in your house again.

MRS. SLATER: She'll come fast enough after her share of what Grandfather's left. You know how hard she can be when she likes. Where she gets it from I can't tell.

[MRS. SLATER *unwraps the parcel* HENRY *has brought. It contains sliced tongue, which she puts on a dish on the table.*]

HENRY: I suppose it's in the family.

MRS. SLATER: What do you mean by that, Henry Slater?

HENRY: I was referring to your father, not to you. Where are my slippers?

MRS. SLATER: In the kitchen; but you want a new pair, those old ones are nearly worn out. (*Nearly breaking down*) You don't seem to realise what it's costing me to bear up like I am doing. My heart's fit to break when I see the little trifles that belonged to Grandfather lying around, and think he'll never use them again. (*Briskly*) Here! you'd better wear these slippers of Grandfather's now. It's lucky he'd just got a new pair.

HENRY: They'll be very small for me, my dear.

MRS. SLATER: They'll stretch, won't they? I'm not going to have them wasted. (*She has finished laying the table.*) Henry, I've been thinking about that bureau of Grandfather's that's in his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.

HENRY: You must arrange with Elizabeth when you are dividing things up.

MRS. SLATER: Elizabeth's that sharp she'll see I'm after it, and she'll drive a hard bargain over it. Eh, what it is to have a low money-grubbing spirit!

HENRY: Perhaps she's got her eye on the bureau as well.

MRS. SLATER: She's never been here since Grandfather bought it. If it was only down here instead of in his room, she'd never guess it wasn't our own.

HENRY (*startled*): Amelia!

[*He rises.*]

MRS. SLATER: Henry, why shouldn't we bring that bureau down here now? We could do it before they come.

HENRY (*stupefied*): I wouldn't care to.

MRS. SLATER: Don't look so daft. Why not?

HENRY: It doesn't seem delicate, somehow.

MRS. SLATER: We could put that shabby old chest of drawers upstairs where the bureau is now. Elizabeth could have that and welcome. I've always wanted to get rid of it.

[*She points to the drawers.*]

HENRY: Suppose they come when we're doing it.

MRS. SLATER: I'll fasten the front door. Get your coat off, Henry; we'll change it.

[MRS. SLATER *goes out to fasten the front door.* HENRY *takes his coat off.* MRS. SLATER *reappears.*

MRS. SLATER: I'll run up and move the chairs out of the way.

[VICTORIA *appears, dressed according to her mother's instructions.*]

VICTORIA: Will you fasten my frock up the back, Mother?

MRS. SLATER: I'm busy; get your father to do it.

[MRS. SLATER *hurries upstairs, and* HENRY *fastens the frock.*]

VICTORIA: What have you got your coat off for, Father?

HENRY: Mother and me is going to bring Grandfather's bureau down here.

VICTORIA (*after a moment's thought*): Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?

HENRY (*shocked*): No, my child. Grandpa gave it to your mother before he died.

VICTORIA: This morning?

HENRY: Yes.

VICTORIA: Ah! He was drunk this morning.

HENRY: Hush; you mustn't ever say he was drunk, now.

[HENRY *has fastened the frock, and* MRS. SLATER *appears carrying a handsome clock under her arm.*]

MRS. SLATER: I thought I'd fetch this down as well. (*She puts it on the mantelpiece.*) Our clock's worth nothing and this always appealed to me.

VICTORIA: That's Grandpa's clock.

MRS. SLATER: Chut! Be quiet! It's ours now. Come, Henry, lift your end. Victoria, don't breathe a word to your aunt about the clock and the bureau.

[*They carry the chest of drawers through the doorway.*]

VICTORIA (*to herself*): I *thought* we'd pinched them.

[*After a short pause there is a sharp knock at the front door.*]

MRS. SLATER (*from upstairs*): Victoria, if that's you aunt and uncle you're not to open the door.

[VICTORIA *peeps through the window.*]

VICTORIA: Mother, it's them!

MRS. SLATER: You're not to open the door till I come down. (*Knocking repeated.*) Let them knock away. (*There is a heavy bumping noise.*) Mind the wall, Henry.

[HENRY *and* MRS. SLATER, *very hot and flushed, stagger in with a pretty old-fashioned bureau containing a locked desk. They put it where the chest of drawers was, and straighten the ornaments, etc. The knocking is repeated.*]

MRS. SLATER: That was a near thing. Open the door, Victoria. Now, Henry, get your coat on.

[*She helps him.*]

HENRY: Did we knock much plaster off the wall?

MRS. SLATER: Never mind the plaster. Do I look all right? (*Straightening her hair at the glass*) Just watch Elizabeth's face when she sees we're all in half mourning. (*Throwing him "Tit Bits"*) Take this and sit down. Try and look as if we'd been waiting for them.

[HENRY *sits in the armchair and* MRS. SLATER *left of table. They read ostentatiously.* VICTORIA *ushers in* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN. *The latter is a stout, complacent woman with an impassive face and an irritating air of being always right. She is wearing a complete and deadly outfit of new mourning crowned by a great black hat with plumes.* BEN *is also in complete new mourning, with black gloves and a band round his hat. He is rather a jolly little man, accustomed to be humorous, but at present trying to adapt himself to the regrettable occasion. He has a bright, chirpy little voice.* MRS. JORDAN *sails into the room*

and solemnly goes straight to MRS. SLATER *and kisses her. The men shake hands.* MRS. JORDAN *kisses* HENRY. BEN *kisses* MRS. SLATER. *Not a word is spoken.* MRS. SLATER *furtively inspects the new mourning.*]

MRS. JORDAN: Well, Amelia, and so he's gone at last.

MRS. SLATER: Yes, he's gone. He was seventy-two a fortnight last Sunday.

[*She sniffs back a tear.* MRS. JORDAN *sits on the left of the table.* MRS. SLATER *on the right,* HENRY *in the armchair.* BEN *on the sofa with* VICTORIA *near him.*]

BEN (*chirpily*): Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse.

MRS. SLATER: I don't see how.

BEN: It might have been one of us.

HENRY: It's taken you a long time to get here, Elizabeth.

MRS. JODAN: Oh, I couldn't do it. I really couldn't do it.

MRS. SLATER (*suspiciously*): Couldn't do what?

MRS. JORDAN: I couldn't start without getting the mourning.

[*Glancing at her sister.*]

MRS. SLATER: We've ordered ours, you may be sure. (*Acidly*) I never could fancy buying ready-made things.

MRS. JORDAN: No? For myself it's such a relief to get into the black. And now perhaps you'll tell us all about it. What did the doctor say?

MRS. SLATER: Oh, he's not been near yet.

MRS. JORDAN: Not been near?

BEN (*in the same breath*): Didn't you send for him at once?

MRS. SLATER: Of course I did. Do you take me for a fool? I sent Henry at once for Dr. Pringle, but he was out.

BEN: You should have gone for another. Eh, Eliza?

MRS. JORDAN: Oh, yes. It's a fatal mistake.

MRS. SLATER: Pringle attended him when he was alive and Pringle shall attend him when he's dead. That's professional etiquette.

BEN: Well, you know your own business best, but—

MRS. JORDAN: Yes—it's a fatal mistake.

MRS. SLATER: Don't talk so silly, Elizabeth. What good could a doctor have done?

MRS. JORDAN: Look at the many cases of persons being restored to life hours after they were thought to be "gone."

HENRY: That's when they've been drowned. Your father wasn't drowned, Elizabeth.

BEN (*humorously*): There wasn't much fear of that. If there was one thing he couldn't bear it was water.

[*He laughs, but no one else does.*]

MRS. JORDAN (*pained*): Ben!

[BEN *is crushed at once.*]

MRS. SLATER (*piqued*): I'm sure he washed regular enough.

MRS. JORDAN: If he did take a drop too much at times, we'll not dwell on that, now.

MRS. SLATER: Father had been "merry" this morning. He went out soon after breakfast to pay his insurance.

BEN: My word, it's a good thing he did.

MRS. JORDAN: He always was thoughtful in that way. He was too honourable to have "gone" without paying his premium.

MRS. SLATER : Well, he must have gone round to the Ring-o'-Bells afterwards, for he came in as merry as a sandboy. I says, "We're only waiting Henry to start dinner." "Dinner," he says, "I don't want no dinner, I'm going to bed !"

BEN (*shaking his head*) : Ah ! Dear, dear.

HENRY : And when I came in I found him undressed sure enough and snug in bed.

[*He rises and stands on the hearth-rug.*]

MRS. JORDAN (*definitely*) : Yes, he'd had a "warning." I'm sure of that. Did he know you ?

HENY : Yes. He spoke to me.

MRS. JORDAN : Did he say he'd had a "warning" ?

HENRY : No. He said, "Henry, would you mind taking my boots off ; I forgot before I got into bed."

MRS. JORDAN : He must have been wandering.

HENRY : No, he'd got 'em on all right...

MRS. SLATER : And when we'd finished dinner I thought I'd take up a bit of something on a tray. He was lying there for all the world as if he was asleep, so I put the tray down on the bureau—(*correcting herself*) on the chest of drawers—and went to waken him. (*A pause.*) He was quite cold.

HENRY : Then I heard Amelia calling for me, and I ran upstairs.

MRS. SLATER : Of course we could do nothing.

MRS. JORDAN : He was "gone" ?

HENRY : There wasn't any doubt.

MRS. JORDAN : I always knew he'd go sudden in the end.

[*A pause. They wipe their eyes and sniff back tears.*]

MRS. SLATER (*rising briskly at length ; in a business-like*

tone): Well, will you go up and look at him now, or shall we have tea?

MRS. JORDAN: What do you say, Ben?

BEN: I'm not particular.

MRS. JORDAN (*surveying the table*): Well then, if the kettle's ready we may as well have tea first.

MRS. SLATER *puts the kettle on the fire and gets tea ready.*]

HENRY: One thing we may as well decide now; the announcement in the papers.

MRS. JORDAN: I was thinking of that. What would you put?

MRS. SLATER: At the residence of his daughter, 235 Upper Cornbank Street, etc.

HENRY: You wouldn't care for a bit of poetry?

MRS. JORDAN: I like "Never Forgotten." It's refined.

HENRY: Yes, but it's rather soon for that.

BEN: You couldn't very well have forgot him the day after.

MRS. SLATER: I always fancy "A loving husband, a kind father, and a faithful friend."

BEN (*doubtfully*): Do you think that's right?

HENRY: I don't think it matters whether it's right or not.

MRS. JORDAN: No, it's more for the look of the thing.

HENRY: I saw a verse in the *Evening News* yesterday. Proper poetry it was. It rhymed.

[*He gets the paper and reads.*]

"Despised and forgotten by some you may be
But the spot that contains you is sacred to we."

MRS. JORDAN: That'll never do. You don't say "Sacred to we."

HENRY: It's in the paper.

MRS. SLATER: You wouldn't say it if you were speaking properly, but it's different in poetry.

HENRY: Poetic licence, you know.

MRS. JORDAN: No, that'll never do. We want a verse that says how much we loved him and refers to all his good qualities and says what a heavy loss we've had.

MRS. SLATER: You want a whole poem. That'll cost a good lot.

MRS. JORDAN: Well, we'll think about it after tea, and then we'll look through his bits of things and make a list of them. There's all the furniture in his room.

HENRY: There's no jewellery or valuables of that sort.

MRS. JORDAN: Except his gold watch. He promised that to our Jimmy.

MRS. SLATER: Promised your Jimmy! I never heard of that.

MRS. JORDAN: Oh, but he did, Amelia, when he was living with us. He was very fond of Jimmy.

MRS. SLATER: Well (*Amazed.*) I don't know!

BEN: Anyhow, there's his insurance money. Have you got the receipt for the premium he paid this morning?

MRS. SLATER: I've not seen it.

[VICTORIA *jumps up from the sofa and comes behind the table.*]

VICTORIA: Mother, I don't think Grandpa went to pay his insurance this morning.

MRS. SLATER: He went out.

VICTORIA: Yes, but he didn't go into the town. He met old Mr. Tattersall down the street, and they went off past St. Philips's Church.

MRS. SLATER: To the Ring-o'-Bells, I'll be bound.

BEN: The Ring-o'-Bells?

MRS. SLATER: That public-house that John Shorrock's widow keeps. He is always hanging about there. Oh, if he hasn't paid it——

BEN: Do you think he hasn't paid it? Was it overdue?

MRS. SLATER: I should think it was overdue.

MRS. JORDAN: Something tells me he's not paid it. I've a "warning," I know it; he's not paid it.

BEN: The drunken old beggar.

MRS. JORDAN: He's done it on purpose, just to annoy us.

MRS. SLATER: After all I've done for him, having to put up with him in the house these three years. It's nothing short of swindling.

MRS. JORDAN: I had to put up with him for five years.

MRS. SLATER: And you were trying to turn him over to us all the time.

HENRY: But we don't know for certain that he's not paid the premium.

MRS. JORDAN: I do. It's come over me all at once that he hasn't.

MRS. SLATER: Victoria, run upstairs and fetch that bunch of keys that's on your grandpa's dressing-table.

VICTORIA (*timidly*): In Grandpa's room?

MRS. SLATER: Yes.

VICTORIA: I—I don't like to.

MRS. SLATER: Don't talk so silly. There's no one can hurt you. (VICTORIA *goes out reluctantly.*) We'll see if he's locked the receipt up in the bureau.

BEN: In where? In this thing?

[*He rises and examines it.*]

MRS. JORDAN: (*also rising*): Where did you pick that up, Amelia? It's new since last I was here.

[*They Examine it closely*]

MRS. SLATER: Oh—Henry picked it up one day.

MRS. JORDAN: I like it. It's artistic. Did you buy it at an auction?

HENRY: Eh! Where did I buy it, Amelia?

MRS. JORDAN: Yes, at an auction.

BEN (*disparagingly*): Oh, second-hand.

MRS. JORDAN: Don't show your ignorance, Ben. All artistic things are second-hand. Look at those old masters.

[VICTORIA *returns, ver scared. She closes the door after her.*]

VICTORIA: Mother! Mother!

MRS. SLATER: What is it, child?

VICTORIA: Grandpa's getting up.

BEN: What?

MRS. SLATER: What do you say?

VICTORIA: Grandpa's getting up.

MRS. JORDAN: The child's crazy.

MRS. SLATER: Don't talk so silly. Don't you know your grandpa's dead?

VICTORIA: No, no; he's getting up. I saw him.

[*They are transfixed with amazement*; BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN *left of table*; VICTORIA *clings to* MRS. SLATER, *right of table*; HENRY *near fireplace.*]

MRS. JORDAN: You'd better go up and see for yourself, Amelia.

MRS. SLATER: Here—come with me, Henry.

[HENRY *draws back terrified.*]

BEN (*suddenly*): Hist! Listen.

[*They look at the door. A slight chuckling is heard outside. The door opens, revealing an old man clad in a faded but gay dressing gown. He is in his stockinged feet. Although over seventy he is vigorous and well coloured; his bright, malicious eyes twinkle under his heavy, reddish-grey eyebrows. He is obviously either* GRANDFATHER ABEL MERRYWEATHER *or else his ghost.*]

ABEL: What's the matter with little Vicky? (*He sees* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN.) Hello! What brings you here? How's yourself, Ben?

[ABEL *thrusts his hand at* BEN, *who skips back smartly and retreats with* MRS. JORDAN *to a safe distance below the sofa.*]

MRS. SLATER (*approaching* ABEL *gingerly*): Grandfather, is that you?

[*She pokes him with her hand to see if he is solid.*]

ABEL: Of course it's me. Don't do that, 'Melia. What the devil do you mean by this tomfoolery?

MRS. SLATER (*to the others*): He's not dead.

BEN: Doesn't seem like it.

ABEL (*irritated by the whispering*): You've kept away long enough, Lizzie; and now you've come you don't seem overpleased to see me.

MRS. JORDAN: You took us by surprise, Father. Are you keeping quite well?

ABEL (*trying to catch the words*): Eh? What?

MRS. JORDAN: Are you quite well?

ABEL: Ay, I'm right enough but for a bit of a headache. I wouldn't mind betting that I'm not the first in this house to be carried to the cemetery. I always think Henry there looks none too healthy.

MRS. JORDAN: Well, I never!

[ABEL *crosses to the armchair and* HENRY *gets out of his way to the front of the table.*]

ABEL: 'Melia, what the dickens did I do with my new slippers?

MRS. SLATER (*confused*): Aren't they by the hearth, Grandfather?

ABEL: I don't see them. (*Observing* HENRY *trying to remove the slippers*) Why, you've got 'em on, Henry.

MRS. SLATER (*promptly*): I told him to put them on to stretch them, they were that new and hard. Now, Henry.

[MRS. SLATER *snatches the slippers from* HENRY *and gives them to* ABEL, *who puts them on and sits in armchair.*]

MRS. JORDAN (*to* BEN): Well, I don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste.

[HENRY *goes up to the window and pulls up the blind.* VICTORIA *runs across to* ABEL *and sits on the floor at his feet.*]

VICTORIA: Oh, Grandpa, I'm so glad you're not dead.

MRS. SLATER (*in a vindictive whisper*): Hold your tongue, Victoria.

ABEL: Eh? What's that? Who's gone dead?

MRS. SLATER (*loudly*): Victoria says she's sorry about your head.

ABEL: Ah, thank you, Vicky, but I'm feeling better.

MRS. SLATER (*to* MRS. JORDAN): He's so fond of Victoria.

MRS. JORDAN (*to* MRS. SLATER): Yes; he's fond of our Jimmy, too.

MRS. SLATER: You'd better ask him if he promised your Jimmy his gold watch.

MRS. JORDAN (*disconcerted*): I couldn't just now. I don't feel equal to it.

ABEL: Why, Ben, you're in mourning! And Lizzie too. And 'Melia, and Henry and little Vicky! Who's gone dead? It's some one in the family.

[*He chuckles.*]

MRS. SLATER: No one you know, Father. A relation of Ben's.

ABEL: And what relation of Ben's?

MRS. SLATER: His brother.

BEN (*to* MRS. SLATER): Dang it, I never had one.

ABEL: Dear, dear. And what was his name, Ben?

BEN (*at a loss*): Er—er.

[*He crosses to front of table.*]

MRS. SLATER (*R. of table, prompting*): Frederick.

MRS. JORDAN (*L. of table, prompting*): Albert.

BEN: Er—Fred—Alb—Issac.

ABEL: Issac? And where did your brother Issac die?

BEN: In—er—in Australia.

ABEL: Dear, dear. He'd be older than you, eh?

BEN: Yes, five years.

ABEL: Ay, ay. Are you going to the funeral?

BEN: Oh, yes.

MRS. SLATER *and* MRS. JORDAN: No, no.

BEN: No, of course not.

[*He retires to L.*]

ABEL (*rising*): Well, I suppose you're only been waiting for me to begin tea I'm feeling hungry.

MRS. SLATER (*taking up the kettle*): I'll make tea.

ABEL: Come along, now; sit you down and let's be jolly.

[ABEL *sits at the head of the table, facing spectators.* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN *on the left.* VICTORIA *brings a chair and sits by* ABEL. MRS. SLATER *and* HENRY *sit on the right.*]

MRS. SLATER: Henry, give Grandpa some tongue.

ABEL: Thank you. I'll make a start.

[*He helps himself to bread and butter.*

HENRY *serves the tongue and* MRS. SLATER *pours out tea. Only* ABEL *eats with any heartiness.*]

BEN: Glad to see you've got an appetite, Mr. Merryweather, although you've not been so well.

ABEL: Nothing serious. I've been lying down for a bit.

MRS. SLATER: Been to sleep, Grandfather?

ABEL: No, I've not been to sleep.

MRS. SLATER *and* HENRY: Oh!

ABEL (*eating and drinking*): I can't exactly call everything to mind, but I remember I was a bit dazed, like. I couldn't move an inch, hand or foot.

BEN: And could you see and hear, Mr. Merryweather?

ABEL: Yes, but I don't remember seeing anything particular. Mustard, Ben.

[BEN *passes the mustard.*]

MRS. SLATER: Of course not, Grandfather. It was all your fancy. You must have been asleep.

ABEL (*snappishly*): I tell you I wasn't asleep, 'Melia.

Damn it, I ought to know.

MRS. JORDAN: Didn't you see Henry or Amelia come into the room?

ABEL (*scratching his head*): Now let me think——

MRS. SLATER: I wouldn't press him, Elizabeth. Don't press him.

HENRY: No. I wouldn't worry him.

ABEL (*suddenly recollecting*): Ay, begad! 'Melia and Henry, what the devil did you mean by shifting my bureau out of my bedroom?

[HENRY *and* MRS. SLATER *are speechless.*]

D'you hear me? Henry! 'Melia!

MRS. JORDAN: What bureau was that, Father?

ABEL: Why, my bureau, the one I bought——

MRS. JORDAN (*pointing to the bureau*): Was it that one, Father?

ABEL: Ah, that's. What's it doing here? Eh?

[*A pause. The clock on the mantelpiece strikes six. Everyone looks at it.*]

Drat me if that isn't my clock, too. What the devil's been going on in this house.

[*A slight pause.*]

BEN: Well, I'll be hanged.

MRS. JORDAN (*rising*): I'll tell you what's been going on in this house, Father. Nothing short of robbery.

MRS. SLATER: Be quiet, Elizabeth.

MRS. JORDAN: I'll not be quiet. Oh, I call it double-faced.

HENRY: Now, now, Elizabeth.

MRS. JORDAN: And you, too. Are you such a poor creature that you must do every dirty thing she tells you?

MRS. SLATER (*rising*): Remember where you are, Elizabeth.

HENRY (*rising*): Come, come. No quarrelling.

BEN (*rising*): My wife's every right to speak her own mind.

MRS. SLATER: Then she can speak it outside, not here.

ABEL (*rising; thumping the table*): Damn it all, will someone tell me what's been going on.

MRS. JORDAN: Yes, I will. I'll not see you robbed.

ABEL: Who's been robbing me?

MRS. JORDAN: Amelia and Henry. They've stolen your clock and bureau. (*Working herself up*). They sneaked into your room like a thief in the night and stole them after you were dead.

HENRY *and* MRS. SLATER: Hush! Quiet, Elizabeth.

MRS. JORDAN: I'll not be stopped. After you were dead, I say.

ABEL: After who was dead?

MRS. JORDAN: You.

ABEL: But I'm not dead.

MRS. JORDAN: No, but they thought you were.

[*A pause.* ABEL *gazes round at them.*]

ABEL: Oho! So that's why you're all in black to-day. You thought I was dead. (*He chuckles.*) That was a big mistake.

[*He sits and resumes his tea.*]

MRS. SLATER (*sobbing*): Grandfather.

ABEL: It didn't take you long to start dividing my things between you.

MRS. JORDAN: No, Father; you mustn't think that. Amelia was simply getting hold of them on her own account.

ABEL: You always were a keen one, Amelia. I suppose you thought the will wasn't fair.

HENRY: Did you make a will?

ABEL: Yes, it was locked up in the bureau.

MRS. JORDAN: And what was in it, Father?

ABEL: That doesn't matter now. I'm thinking of destroying it and making another.

MRS. SLATER (*sobbing*): Grandfather, you'll not be hard on me.

ABEL: I'll trouble you for another cup of tea, 'Melia; two lumps and plenty of milk.

MRS. SLATER: With pleasure, Grandfather.

[*She pours out the tea.*]

ABEL: I don't want to be hard on anyone. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Since your mother died, I've lived part of the time with you, 'Melia, and part with you, Lizzie. Well, I shall make a new will, leaving all my bits of things to whoever I'm living with when I die. How does that strike you?

HENRY: It's a bit of a lottery, like.

MRS. JORDAN: And who do you intend to live with from now?

ABEL (*drinking his tea*): I'm just coming to that.

MRS. JORDAN: You know, Father, it's quite time you came to live with us again. We'd make you very comfortable.

MRS. SLATER: No, he's not been with us as long as he was with you.

MRS. JORDAN: I may be wrong, but I don't think Father will fancy living on with you after what's happened to-day.

ABEL: So you'd like to have me again, Lizzie?

MRS. JORDAN: You know we're ready for you to make your home with us for as long as you please.

ABEL: What do you say to that, 'Melia?

MRS. SLATER: All I can say is that Elizabeth's changed her mind in the last two years. (*Rising*) Grandfather, do you know what the quarrel between us was about?

MRS. JORDAN: Amelia, don't be a fool; sit down.

MRS. SLATER: No, if I'm not to have him, you shan't either. We quarrelled because Elizabeth said she wouldn't take you off our hands at any price. She said she'd had enough of you to last a lifetime, and we'd got to keep you.

ABEL: It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you've treated me.

MRS. SLATER: If I've done anything wrong, I'm sure I'm sorry for it.

MRS. JORDAN: And I can't say more than that, too.

ABEL: It's a bit late to say it, now. You neither of you cared to put up with me.

MRS. SLATER *and* MRS. JORDAN: No, no, Grandfather.

ABEL: Ay, you both say that because of what I've told you about leaving my money. Well, since you don't want me I'll go to someone that does.

BEN: Come, Mr. Merryweather, you've got to live with one of your daughters.

ABEL: I'll tell you what I've got to do. On Monday next I've got to do three things. I've got to go to the lawyer's and alter my will; and I've got to go to the insurance office and pay my premium; and I've got

to go to St. Philips's Church and get married.

BEN *and* HENRY: What!

MRS. JORDAN: Get married!

MRS. SLATER: He's out of his senses.

[*General consternation.*]

ABEL: I say I'm going to get married.

MRS. SLATER: Who to?

ABEL: To Mrs. John Shorrocks who keeps the Ring-o'-Bells. We've had it fixed up a good while now, but I was keeping it for a pleasant surprise. (*He rises.*) I felt I was a bit of a burden to you, so I found someone who'd think it a pleasure to look after me. We shall be very glad to see you at the ceremony. (*He gets to the door.*) Till Monday, then. Twelve o'clock at St. Philips's Church. (*Opening the door*) It's a good thing you brought that bureau downstairs, 'Melia. It'll be handier to carry across to the Ring-o'-Bells on Monday.

[*He goes out.*]

CURTAIN

VILLA FOR SALE

A Comedy

by

SACHA GUITRY

CHARACTERS

GASTOR
JEANNE
JULIETTE
MRS. AL SMITH
MAID

VILLA FOR SALE

The scene represents the solon of a small villa near Nogent-sur-Marne.

When the curtain rises, the MAID *and* JULIETTE *are discovered.*

MAID : Won't madame be sorry ?

JULIETTE : Not at all. Mind you, if someone had bought it on the very day I placed it for sale, then I might have felt sorry, because I would have wondered if I hadn't been a fool to sell at all. But the sign has been hanging on the gate for over a month now, and I am beginning to be afraid that the day I bought it was when I was the real fool.

MAID : All the same, madame, when they brought you the "For Sale" sign, you wouldn't let them put it up. You waited until it was night. Then you went and hung it yourself, madame.

JULIETTE : I know ! You see, I thought that, as they could not read it in the dark, the house would belong to me for one night more. I was so sure that the next day the entire world would be fighting to purchase. For the first week I was annoyed every time I passed the "Villa for Sale" sign. The neighbours seemed to look at me in such a strange kind of way that I began to think the whole thing was going to be much more of a sell than a sale. That was a month ago and now

I have only one thought—that is to get the wretched place off my hands. I would sacrifice it at any price. One hundred thousand francs if necessary—and that's only twice what it cost me. I thought I would get two hundred thousand, but I suppose I must cut my loss. Besides, for the past two weeks four people almost bought it, so I begin to feel that it no longer belongs to me. Oh! I'm fed up with the place. Because nobody really wants it! What time did those agency people say the lady would call?

MAID Between four and five, madame.

JULIETTE: Then we must wait for her.

MAID: It was a nice little place for you to spend the weekends, madame.

JULIETTE: Yes...but times are hard and business is as bad as it can be.

MAID: In that case, madame, is it a good time to sell?

JULIETTE: No, perhaps not...But still...there are moments in life when it's the right time to buy, but it's never the right time to sell. For fifteen years everybody has had money at the same time and nobody has wanted to sell. Now nobody has any money and nobody wants to buy. But still even so ...it would be funny if I couldn't manage to sell a place here, a stone's throw from Joinville, the French Hollywood, when all I'm asking is a paltry hundred thousand.

MAID: That reminds me, there is a favour I want to ask you, madame.

JULIETTE: Yes, what is it, my girl?

MAID : Will you be kind enough to let me off between nine and noon to-morrow morning ?

JULIETTE : From nine till noon ?

MAID : They have asked me to play in a film at the Joinville Studio.

JULIETTE : You are going to act for the cinema ?

MAID : Yes, madame.

JULIETTE : What kind of part are you going to play ?

MAID : A maid, madame. They prefer the real article. They say maids are born maids, not made maids. They are giving me a hundred francs a morning for doing it.

JULIETTE : One hundred francs ?

MAID : Yes, madame. And, as you only pay me four hundred a month, I can't very well refuse, can I, madame ?

JULIETTE : A hundred francs ! It's unbelievable !

MAID : Will you permit me, madame, to tell you something I've suddenly thought of ?

JULIETTE : What ?

MAID : They want a cook in the film as well. They asked me if I knew of anybody suitable. You said just now, madame, that times were hard...Would you like me to get you the engagement ?

JULIETTE : What ?

MAID : Every little helps, madame. Especially, madame, as you have such a funny face.

JULIETTE : Thank you.

MAID (*taking no notice*) : They might take you on for eight days, madame. That would mean eight hundred francs. It's really money for nothing. You would only have to peel potatoes one minute and make an

omelette the next ; quite easy. I could show you how to do it, madame.

JULIETTE : But how kind of you...Thank God I'm not quite so hard up as that yet !

MAID : Oh, madame, I hope you are not angry with me ?

JULIETTE : Not in the least.

MAID : You see, madame, film acting is rather looked up to round here. Everybody wants to do it. Yesterday the butcher didn't open his shop ; he was being shot all the morning. To-day, nobody could find the four policemen ; they were taking part in Monsieur Milton's fight scene in his new film. Nobody thinks about anything else round here now. You see, they pay so well. The manager is offering a thousand francs for a real beggar who has had nothing to eat for two days. Some people have all the luck ! Think it over, madame.'

JULIETTE : Thanks, I will.

MAID : If you would go and see them with your hair slicked back the way you do when you are dressing, madame, I am sure they would engage you right away. Because really, madame, you look too comical !

JULIETTE : Thank you ! (*The bell rings.*) I am going upstairs for a moment. If that is the lady, tell her I will not be long. It won't do to give her the impression that I am waiting for her.

MAID : Very good, madame. (*Exit* JULIETTE.) (*As she runs off to open front door*) Oh, if I could become a Greta Garbo ! Why can't I ? Oh !

[*Voices heard off. A second later, the* MAID *returns, showing in* GASTON *and* JEANNE.]

MAID : If you will be kind enough to sit down, I will tell madame that you are here.

JEANNE : Thank you.

[*Exit* MAID.]

GASTON : And they call that a garden ! Why, it's a yard with a patch of grass in the middle.

JEANNE : But the inside of the house seems very nice, Gaston.

GASTON : Twenty-five yards of cretonne and a dash of paint...you can get that anywhere.

JEANNE : That's not fair. Wait until you've seen the rest of it.

GASTON : Why should I ? I don't want to see the kitchen to know that the garden is a myth and that the *salon* is impossible.

JEANNE : What's the matter with it ?

GASTON : Matter ! Why, you can't even call it a *salon*.

JEANNE : Perhaps there is another.

GASTON : Never mind the other. I'm talking about this one.

JEANNE : We could do something very original with it.

GASTON : Yes, make it an annexe to the garden.

JEANNE : No, but a kind of study.

GASTON : A study ? Good Lord ! You're not thinking of going in for studying, are you ?

JEANNE : Don't be silly ! You know perfectly well what a modern study is.

GASTON : No, I don't.

JEANNE : Well...er...it's a place where...where one gathers...

GASTON : Where one gathers what ?

JEANNE : Don't be aggravating, please ! If you don't want the house, tell me so at once and we'll say no more about it.

GASTON : I told you before we crossed the road that I didn't want it. As soon as you see a sign "Villa for Sale" you have to go inside and be shown over it. It's a perfect mania with you.

JEANNE : What do you mean by a mania ?

GASTON : You women are so curious...you can't resist the pleasure of sticking your noses into another woman's bathroom ..especially if you don't know her. The truth is, you are eternally hoping to ferret out some cold cream which is better than the one you use yourself.

JEANNE : Oh, dear ! Oh, dear ! Are we looking for a villa or are we not ?

GASTON : We are not.

JEANNE : What do you mean : "We are not" ? Then we're not looking for a villa ?

GASTON : Certainly not It's just an idea you've had stuck in your head for the past month.

JEANNE ; But we've talked about nothing else...

GASTON : You mean you've talked about nothing else. I've never talked about it. You see, you've talked about it so much that you thought we were talking. You haven't even noticed that I've never joined in the conversation. If you say that you are looking for a villa, then that's different !

JEANNE : Well...at any rate...whether I'm looking for it or we're looking for it, the one thing that matters anyway is that I'm looking for it for us !

GASTON : It's not for us...it's for your parents. You are simply trying to make me buy a villa so that you

can put your father and mother in it. You see, I know you If you get what you want, do you realise what would happen? We would spend the month of August in the villa, but your parents would take possession of it every year from the beginning of April until the end of September. What's more, they would bring the whole tribe of your sister's children with them. No! I am very fond of your family, but not quite so fond as that.

JEANNE: Then why have you been looking over villas for the past week?

GASTON: I have not been looking over them; you have, and it bores me.

JEANNE: Well...

GASTON: Well what?

JEANNE: Then stop being bored and buy one. That will finish it. We won't tilk about it any more.

GASTON: Exactly!

JEANNE: As far as that goes, what of it? Suppose I do want to buy a villa for papa and mamma? What of it?

GASTON: My darling, I quite admit that you want to buy a villa for your father and mother. But please admit on your side that I don't want to pay for it.

JEANNE: There's my dowry.

GASTON: Your dowry! My poor child, we have spent that long ago.

JEANNE: But since then you have made a fortune.

GASTON: Quite so. I have, but you haven't. Anyway, there's no use discussing it. I will not buy a villa, and that ends it.

JEANNE: Then it wasn't worth while coming in.

GASTON : That's exactly what I told you at the door.

JEANNE : In that case, let's go.

GASTON : By all means.

JEANNE : What on earth will the lady think of us ?

GASTON : I have never cared such a damned little, about anybody's opinion. Come along.

[*He takes his hat and goes towards the door. At this moment* JULIETTE *enters.*]

JULIETTE : Good afternoon, madame...monsieur...

JEANNE : How do you do, madame ?

GASTON : Good day.

JULIETTE : Won't you sit down ? (*They all three sit*) Is your first impression a good one ?

JEANNE : Excellent.

JULIETTE : I am not in the least surprised. It is a most delightful little place. Its appearance is modest, but it has a charm of its own. I can tell by just looking at you that it would suit you admirably, as you suit it, if you will permit me to say so. Coming from me, it may surprise you to hear that you already appear to be at home. The choice of a frame is not so easy when you have such a delightful pastel to place in it. (*She naturally indicates* JEANNE, *who is flattered.*) The house possesses a great many advantages. Electricity, gas, water, telephone, and drainage. The bathroom is beautifully fitted and the roof was entirely repaired last year.

JEANNE : Oh, that is very important, isn't it, darling ?

GASTON : For whom ?

JULIETTE : The garden is not very large...it's not long and it's not wide...

GASTON : But, my word, it is high !

JULIETTE: That's not exactly what I meant. Your husband is very witty, madame. As I was saying, the garden is not very large, but, you see, it is surrounded by other gardens...

GASTON: On the principle that people who like children and haven't any always go and live near a school.

JEANNE: Please don't joke, Gaston. What this lady says is perfectly right. Will you tell me, madame, what price you are asking for the villa?

JULIETTE: Well, you see, I must admit, quite frankly, that I don't want to sell it any more.

GASTON (*rising*): Then there's nothing further to be said about it.

JULIETTE: Please, I...

JEANNE: Let madame finish, darling.

JULIETTE: Thank you. I was going to say that for exceptional people like you I don't mind giving it up. One arranges a house in accordance with one's taste—if you understand what I mean—to suit oneself, as it were—so one would not like to think that ordinary people had come to live in it. But to you, I can say with perfect assurance, I agree. Yes, I will sell it to you.

JEANNE: It's extremely kind of you.

GASTON: Extremely...Yes...but...er......what's the price, madame?

JULIETTE: You will never believe it...

GASTON: I believe in God, and so, you see...

JULIETTE: Entirely furnished, with all the fixtures, just as it is with the exception of that one little picture signed by Corot. I don't know if you have ever heard of that painter, have you?

GASTON : No, never.

JULIETTE : Neither have I. For the villa itself, just as it stands, two hundred and fifty thousand francs. I repeat that I would much rather dispose of it at less than its value to people like yourselves than to give it up, even for more money, to someone whom I didn't like. The price must seem...

GASTON : Decidedly excessive...

JULIETTE : Oh, no !

GASTON : Oh, yes, madame.

JULIETTE : Well, really, I must say I'm...

GASTON : Quite so. Life is full of surprises, isn't it ?

JULIETTE : You think it dear at two hundred and fifty thousand. Very well, I can't be fairer than this : make me an offer.

GASTON : If I did, it would be very much less than that.

JULIETTE : Make it, anyway.

GASTON : It's very awkward ..I...

JEANNE : Name some figure, darling...just to please me.

GASTON : Well, hardly know...sixty thousand...

JEANNE }
JULIETTE } Oh !

GASTON : What do you mean by "Oh !" ? It isn't worth more than that to me.

JULIETTE : I give you my word of honour, monsieur, I cannot let it go for less than two hundred thousand.

GASTON : You have a perfect right to do as you please, madame.

JULIETTE : I tell you what I will do. I will be philanthropic and let you have it for two hundred thousand.

GASTON: And I will be equally good-natured and let you keep it for the same price.

JULIETTE: In that case, there is nothing more to be said, monsieur.

GASTON: Good day, madame.

JEANNE: One minute, darling. Before you definitely decide, I would love you to go over the upper floor with me.

JULIETTE: I will show it to you with the greatest pleasure. This way, madame. This way, monsieur...

GASTON: No, thank you...really...I have made up my mind and I'm not very fond of climbing stairs.

JULIETTE: Just as you wish, monsieur. (*To* JEANNE) Shall I lead the way?

JEANNE: If you please, madame.

[*Exit* JULIETTE.]

(*To her husband*): You're not over-polite, are you?

GASTON: Oh, my darling! For Heaven's sake, stop worrying me over this shanty. Go and examine the bathroom and come back quickly.

[*Exit* JEANNE, *following* JULIETTE.]

(*To himself*) Two hundred thousand for a few yards of land...She must think I'm crazy...

[*The door-bell rings, and a moment later the* MAID *re-enters, showing in* MRS. AL SMITH.]

MAID: If madame would be kind enough to come in.

MRS. AL SMITH: See here now, I tell you I'm in a hurry. How much do they want for this house?

MAID: I don't know anything about it, madame.

MRS. AL SMITH: To start off with, why isn't the price marked on the sign-board? You French people have a cute way of doing business! You go and tell your boss that if he doesn't come right away, I'm

going. I haven't any time to waste. Any hold-up makes me sick when I want something. (MAID *goes out.*) Oh, you're the husband, I suppose. Good afternoon. Do you speak American ?

GASTON : Sure...you betcha...

MRS. AL SMITH : That goes by me. How much for the house ?

GASTON : How much ?...Well ?...Won't you sit down.

MRS. AL SMITH : I do things standing up.

GASTON : Oh ! Do you ?

MRS. AL SMITH : Yep ! Where's your wife ?

GASTON : My wife ? Oh, she's upstairs.

MRS. AL SMITH : Well, she can stay there. Unless you have to consult her before you make a sale ?

GASTON : Me ? Not on your life !

MRS. AL SMITH : You are an exception. Frenchmen usually have to consult about ten people before they get a move on. Listen ! Do you or don't you want to sell this house ?

GASTON : I ?...I'd love to !

MRS. AL SMITH : Then what about it ? I haven't more than five minutes to spare.

GASTON : Sit down for three of them, anyway. To begin with, this villa was built by my grandfather...

MRS. AL SMITH : I don't care a darn about your grandfather !

GASTON : Neither do I...But I must tell you that I...er...

MRS. AL SMITH : Listen, just tell me the price.

GASTON : Let me explain that...

MRS. AL SMITH : No !

GASTON : We have electricity, gas, telephone...

MRS. AL SMITH : I don't care ! What's the price ?

GASTON : But you must go over the house...

MRS. AL SMITH : No !...I want to knock it down and build a bungalow here.

GASTON : Oh, I see.

MRS. AL SMITH : Yep, it's the land I want. I have to be near Paramount, where I'm going to shoot some films.

GASTON : Oh !

MRS. AL SMITH : Yep ! You see, I'm a big star.

GASTON : Not really ?

MRS. AL SMITH (*amiably*) : Yep ! How do you do ? Well now, how much ?

GASTON : Now, let's see...In that case, entirely furnished, with the exception of that little picture by an unknown artist...it belonged to my grandmother and I want to keep it...

MRS. AL SMITH : Say ! You do love your grandparents in Europe !

GASTON : We have had them for such a long time !

MRS. AL SMITH : You folk are queer. You think about the past all the time. We always think about the future.

GASTON : Everybody thinks about what he has got.

MRS. AL SMITH : What a pity you don't try and copy us more.

GASTON : Copies are not always good. We could only imitate you, and imitations are no better than parodies. We are so different. Think of it..... Europeans go to America to earn money and Americans come to Europe to spend it.

MRS. AL SMITH : Just the same, you ought to learn how to do business.

GASTON: We are learning now. We are practising...

MRS. AL SMITH: Well, then, how much?

GASTON: The house? Let me see...I should say three hundred thousand francs......The same for everybody, you know. Even though you are an American, I wouldn't dream of raising the price.

MRS. AL SMITH: Treat me the same as anybody. Then you say it is three hundred thousand?

GASTON: "Since you are dear bought—I will love you dear."

MRS. AL SMITH: Say, you, what do you take me for?

GASTON: Sorry. That's Shakespeare......I mean cash...

MRS. AL SMITH: Now I get you...cash down! Say! You're coming on!

[*She takes her cheque-book from her bag.*]

GASTON (*fumbling in a drawer*): Wait......I never know where they put my pen and ink...

MRS. AL SMITH: Let me tell you something. You'd better buy yourself a fountain-pen with the money you get for the villa. What date is to-day?

GASTON: The twenty-fourth.

MRS. AL SMITH: You can fill in your name on the cheque yourself. I live at the Ritz Hotel, Place Vendome. My lawyer is...

GASTON: Who?

MRS. AL SMITH: Exactly.

GASTON: What?

MRS. AL SMITH: My lawyer is Mr. Who, 5 rue Cambon. He will get in touch with yours about the rest of the transaction. Good-bye.

GASTON: Good-bye.

MRS. AL SMITH: When are you leaving?

GASTON : Well......er......I don't quite know...... Whenever you like.

MRS. AL SMITH : Make it to-morrow, and my architect can come on Thursday. Good-bye. I'm delighted.

GASTON : Delighted to hear it, madame. (*She goes, and he looks at cheque.*) It's a very good thing in business when everyone is delighted !

[*At this moment* JEANNE *and* JULIETTE *return.*]

GASTON : Well ?

JEANNE : Well... of course... it's very charming...

JULIETTE : Of course, as I told you, it's not a large place. I warned you. There are two large bedrooms and one small one.

GASTON : Well, now, that's something !

JEANNE (*to her husband*) : You are quite right, darling I'm afraid it would not be suitable. Thank you, madame ; we need not keep you any longer.

JULIETTE : Oh, that's quite all right.

GASTON : Just a moment, just a moment, my dear. You say there are two large bedrooms and a small one...

JULIETTE : Yes, and two servant's rooms.

GASTON : Oh ! There are two servants' rooms in addition, are there ?

JULIETTE : Yes.

GASTON : But that's excellent !

JEANNE : Gaston, stop joking !

GASTON : And the bathroom ? What's that like ?

JULIETTE : Perfect ! There's bath in it...

GASTON: Oh, there's bath in the bathroom, is there?

JULIETTE: Of course there is!

GASTON: It's all very important. A bathroom with a bath in it. Bedrooms, two large and one small, two servants' rooms and a garden. It's really possible. While you were upstairs, I have been thinking a lot about your papa and mamma. You see, I am really unselfish, and then the rooms for your sister's children...Also my dear, I've been thinking......... and this is serious......about our old age......It's bound to come sooner or later, and the natural desire of old age is a quiet country spot...(*To* JULIETTE) You said two hundred thousand, didn't you?

JEANNE: What on earth are you driving at?

GASTON: Just trying to please you, darling.

JULIETTE: Yes, two hundred thousand is my lowest. Cash, of course.

GASTON: Well, that's fixed. I won't argue about it.

[*He takes out his cheque-book.*]

JEANNE: But there are so many things to be discussed before...

GASTON: Not at all. Only one thing. As I am not arguing about the price, as I'm not bargaining with you...well, you must be nice to me, you must allow me to keep this little picture which has kept me company while you and my wife went upstairs.

JULIETTE: It's not a question of value...

GASTON: Certainly not...just as a souvenir...

JULIETTE: Very well, you may keep it.

GASTON: Thank you, madame. Will you give me a receipt please? Our lawyers will draw up the details

of the sale. Please fill in your name...Let me see, it's the twenty-third, isn't it ?

JULIETTE : No, the twenty-fourth...

GASTON : What does it matter. One day more or less. (*She signs the receipt and exchanges it for his cheque.*) Splendid.

JULIETTE : Thank you, monsieur.

GASTON : Here is my card. Good-bye, madame. Oh, by the way, you will be kind enough to leave to-morrow morning, won't you ?

JULIETTE : To morrow ! So soon ?

GASTON : Well, say to-morrow evening at the latest.

JULIETTE : Yes, I can manage that. Good-bye, madame.

JEANNE : Good day, madame.

GASTON : I'll take my little picture with me, if you don't mind ? (*He unhooks it.*) Just a beautiful souvenir, you know...

JULIETTE : Very well. I'll show you the garden on the way out.

[*Exit* JULIETTE.]

JEANNE : What on earth have you done ?

GASTON : I ? Made a hundred thousand francs and a Corot !

JEANNE : But how ?

GASTON : I'll tell you later.

CURTAIN

MONEYS FROM SHYLOCK

by

H. F. RUBINSTEIN

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SIR THOMAS EGERTON, *Warden of the House of Converts*

FORTUNATI MASSA } *inmates of the House*

NATHANIEL MENDA } *inmates of the House*

ABIGAIL, *Menda's niece*

SCENE: *Reception room in the House of Converts, Chancery Lane, London.*

MONEYS FROM SHYLOCK

The Domus Conversorum in the "New Street by the Temple" (on the site now occupied by the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane) has muddled through three centuries since the Expulsion of the Jews in 1290 deprived it of its practical raison d'etre. The office of Warden having from an early date become united with that of Master of the Rolls, the buildings have been utilized as storehouses for the Rolls, or records of Chancery proceedings, while a trickle of inmates, failing only for one complete gap of twenty-six years, has provided sinecures for an unbroken succession of Chaplains and clerks, subordinate to the titular Warden. During the greater part of Elizabeth's reign two elderly males have monopolized the hospitality, and the pensions (1½d. per day), for which their renunciation of Judaism has qualified them.

The reception room, furnished after the manner of a monastic parlour, affords entrance through an open door (centre) into an attractive garden (a portion of which has been preserved to this day). Another door (left) gives access from the Domus proper.

William Shakespeare, in the early thirties, a successful man of the world, is discovered alone, examining the apartment with practised eye. He has turned to admire the garden, when Sir Thomas Egerton, an older gentleman of aristocratic bearing, enters from left.

EGERTON: Sir?

SHAKESPEARE [*turning*]: Master Egerton?

EGERTON: I am the Warden of this establishment. You wished to see me?

SHAKESPEARE: To solicit a pardon—and a favour, sir. My name is Shakespeare.

EGERTON [*with a bow*]: A name not unfamiliar to me. Indeed, now I can recognize your face.

SHAKESPEARE: With no unfriendliness, I trust?

EGERTON: On the contrary, sir. I have visited your playhouse, and feel flattered that you should deem *my* house worthy of a visit—a house so inferior in popularity!

SHAKESPEARE: But how much more venerable! Founded by the first Edward, was it not?

EGERTON: Nay, sir, by King Henry the Third, in the year of Our Lord 1232, for the redemption of the souls of himself and of King John, his father.

SHAKESPEARE [*scenting a bore*]: I thank you, Master Egerton. I had understood as much. [*He clears his throat.*] Your acquaintance with my calling emboldens me to come directly to the point. The truth is, sir—but for your private ear, if you please—I am at present writing a stage-play in which I present some characters of the Hebrew nation.

EGERTON: Following the lead of that unhappy genius Christopher Marlowe?

SHAKESPEARE: I must acknowledge more than one indebtedness to poor Kit Marlowe, sir, and, indeed, I am no stranger to his *Jew of Malta*. But I intend, if I can, to portray my infidels with a more exact regard for their native singularities. And now, sir, happening, as I

have frequent occasion, to pass this way, it came into my head that, by your gracious leave, some conference with these strange guests of yours might provide matter highly congruous to my purpose.

EGERTON: I conceive you, sir, and shall willingly place my two converts at your disposal.

SHAKESPEARE [*taken aback*]: Only two?

EGERTON: Why, sir, you may reckon yourself fortunate! Had you inquired here some twenty years ago you would have found our Domus without a single inmate, saving only my worthy predecessor, his two chaplains, and a clerk—[*with a chuckle*] all, I may, say, in receipt of the customary emoluments!

SHAKESPEARE: These converts are rare birds?

EGERTON: You must remember, sir, that our business was founded at a time when we had the teeming Jewries of every English city from which to fish for recruits. In those palmy days we could have mustered a community of some eighty souls. After the banishment of the tribe by King Edward the First our numbers gradually dwindled. As you are interested, I will show you the figures abstracted from our ledgers.

SHAKESPEARE: I pray you, sir—I really must not trespass on your valuable time.

EGERTON [*smiling*]: Protest no more, Master Shakespeare. I see you are impatient to confront our brace of patriarchs!

SHAKESPEARE: Patriarchs? They are both males?

EGERTON: You seem surprised?

SHAKESPEARE: Indeed, sir, I will confess I had hopes—The truth is I chanced to see a woman of

Hebraic aspect (or so I judged) entering your door-way as I was passing in the street a day or two ago. She was a visitor, no doubt.

EGERTON: Visitors are allowed. Our last female inmate, Mary Cook—distinguished before her baptism by the name of Bathsheba Isaiah—disappeared from our records in the years 1551——

SHAKESPEARE [*hardly attending*]: Indeed, sir...I have heard it said that there are Jews and Jewesses even nowadays living secretly in London, if one knew where to look for them.

EGERTON: You were in hopes we could have furnished some female Barabas for a *role* in your comedy?

SHAKESPEARE: A daughter of Barabas would be near the mark.

EGERTON: Aha! I'll warrant you a fine, flashing wench to tickle a man's palate, eh?

SHAKESPEARE: She will meet with approval, I think.

EGERTON: Then she is to turn Christian, I'll hazard?

SHAKESPEARE: Better than that, sir. She shall slip from her Jew father's custody after spoiling him of his treasure for the endowment of her Christian lover!

EGERTON: Admirable, i' faith! And so all ends merrily?

SHAKESPEARE: Nay, sir, that's hardly more than the first move in the game. By my contrivance the old usurer shall prepare a gruesome revenge, to be outwitted on the point of its accomplishment, and so caught in his own toils that to save his skin he must needs accept baptism.

EGERTON: Ha! So you would have him seek admittance in this House!

SHAKESPEARE: My scene is Venice, sir.

EGERTON: I have seen more than one of your plays, Master Shakespeare, and have been moved both to laughter and to tears. Indeed, I envy you your penmanship, for I'm sure there's money in our applause.

SHAKESPEARE: I have not done so badly.

EGERTON: But do you know how to keep your money, sir? For they say you poets and players spend as fast as you make.

SHAKESPEARE: That is not to be said of me, sir. I have no quarrel with the law that allows a man to put his money out to a fair yield.

EGERTON: Up to ten per cent,—on a good mortgage security, eh? You should prosper every way, then, sir. Nay—if I may fit my words to the occasion—I will wish your new play may make you as rich as a Jew!

[*Enter from the garden Fortunati Massa, a squat and picturesquely bearded old man, soberly clad.*]

SHAKESPEARE: Aha! [*He rises.*]

MASSA [*turning back*]: Pardon, masters.

[*He has a strong foreign accent.*]

EGERTON [*also rising*]: Nay, come forward, honest Massa. Here is a gentlemen greatly desires to be acquainted with you. This, sir [*to Shakespeare*], is Fortunati Massa, who has lived here for—what is it, fourteen years?

MASSA: Fifteen come Christmas, your lordship.

EGERTON [*to Shakespeare*]: He draws his wages at Christmas...if you like I will leave you together.

SHAKESPEARE: I am greatly obliged to you, sir.

EGERTON: You will take a glass of wine with me before you go, I hope?

SHAKESPEARE: You are most kind.

EGERTON: Perhaps you will inquire for me in my office, then?

[*With a bow he withdraws, left. A pause. Massa looks about him uneasily.*]

SHAKESPEARE: Will you be seated, Master Massa?

MASSA [*suspicious*]: You wish with me to speak?

SHAKESPEARE: If you will bear with me. I seek enlightenment.

MASSA [*puzzled*]: Enlight——

SHAKESPEARE: To learn from you. [*As Massa merely gapes*] I assure you I am serious.

MASSA: You—learn—from—me?

SHAKESPEARE: Yes, yes. About yourself—your way of living——

MASSA: This house, not? I show you all things!

SHAKESPEARE: Presently. Perhaps. But first, if you please, a friendly catechism.

MASSA: Catechism! It is good! "What is your name?" Fortunati. "Who gave you this name?"

SHAKESPEARE: Bravo! The very question I was about to ask.

MASSA [*glibly*]: "My Godfathers and Godmothers in my Baptism; wherein I was made——"

SHAKESPEARE: Thank you, thank you—enough! But now, mark me! *Before* your baptism what was formerly your name—the name given to you at birth?

MASSA: Call me Cooba.

SHAKESPEARE: Cooba? Ah, Jacoba, belike, Jacob ...And where were you born?

MASSA: If you would tell me!

SHAKESPEARE: You are in ignorance?

MASSA: Much, much ignorance! Name Cooba: yes—father mother, not so much!

SHAKESPEARE: You never knew your parents? The family would have come from Portugal or Spain, perhaps—would have inhabited those parts, I mean, before the Inquisition?

MASSA: Surely, surely.

SHAKESPEARE: And your childhood—you were reared abroad, I dare say, in some town?

MASSA: One town—another town?

SHAKESPEARE: Moving about, eh? In company with your fellow-exiles?

MASSA [*nodding*]: Much company.

SHAKESPEARE: And so you would have acquired a Jewish upbringing? [*As Massa looks puzzled*] You were not brought up to be a pork-eater? [*Massa grins in confirmation.*] Then you had knowledge of your Jewish parentage?

MASSA [*amused*]: Truly! Cooba Massa Jew. My great big knowledge!

SHAKESPEARE: But you had other knowledge? [*Massa shakes his head.*] Come, you must have learnt a thing or two, even if you had no regular schooling.

MASSA: Please, what I learn?

SHAKESPEARE: Speech. Hebrew speech, perhaps?

MASSA: Hebrew speech, no. Hebrew *Torah*, many words I hea . You wish me say Hebrew words?

SHAKESPEARE: It would be wasted on me, I fear.

MASSA: Hebrew Torah must difficult. [*He becomes pensive.*] Me try learn. Bad head, me think. Learn nothing never.

SHAKESPEARE : You must surely have had some training in a business—learnt to make money, eh ?

MASSA : Cooba make money ? Now you jest with me ! [*He laughs*]. Not Cooba—Fortunati, he makè the money ! He received fine wages. God save the Queen !

SHAKESPEARE : But Cooba must have *tried* to make money !

MASSA : Try, yes. Buy, sell, old clothes once, twice. Street beggarman many time, many place.

SHAKESPEARE : What places ? You have been a great traveller, it seems ?

MASSA : All the life travel, before me converted. Morocco, Constantinople, Salonica, much Italia—Turin, Ancona——

SHAKESPEARE : Venice ?

MASSA : Venice, yes. Genoa, Napoli——

SHAKESPEARE : Tell me about Venice. What do you remember of it ?

MASSA : Water. Much water.

SHAKESPEARE : There is a quarter assigned to Jews in that city ? [*Massa is puzzled.*] A street or streets where only Jews inhabit ?

MASSA : It may be. Me remember not. Water me remember.

SHAKESPEARE [*disappointed*] : Water. Of course... You remember nothing else ?

MASSA : Not wishful remember from bad life. Now is finished.

SHAKESPEARE : This life contents you better ?

MASSA : Here is great comfort.

SHAKESPEARE [*dryly*] : They feed you well ? [*Massa nods vigorously.*] And how do you pass the

time when you are not eating or sleeping? You have no head for study.

MASSA: Head, no, but legs, eyes, ears. Can walk in streets, see fine dresses, pretty ladies, eh? [*Shakespeare must smile in sympathy*]. Can talk with Menda.

SHAKESPEARE: Menda? Ah, he is your fellow-pensioner? You are good friends?

MASSA [*with a shrug*]: Friends? My poor head! Menda he great, clever man!

SHAKESPEARE: What, he can read, perhaps, and write?

MASSA: But more yet! Hebrew, Spanish, English. Such a head, I tell you!

SHAKESPEARE: And you are privileged to converse with this learned gentleman?

MASSA: Great walkings we make together—by river, over fields. Or we will go Blackfriars, ferry-boat across Thames water, into Pairs Gardens. Once he bring me to Newington Butts, what you call playhouse.

SHAKESPEARE: What, you visited the playhouse? How did you like that adventure?

MASSA [*decidedly*]: Not like.

SHAKESPEARE: The play was not to your taste? Do you remember the name of it?

MASSA: Well remember. *Jews of Malta.*

SHAKESPEARE: Yes, that must have been a memorable occasion—you and Master Menda among the spectators.

MASSA: And so close we keep together, or they beat us, perhaps. It was—how you say?—calumny! I beg you not know that play.

SHAKESPEARE: But I know it well. The man who wrote it was my friend.

MASSA: Your friend much ignorant, me think.

SHAKESPEARE [*stiffly*]: You many think so, if you please.

MASSA [*sensitive to the change of tone*]: Massa speak too much.

SHAKESPEARE: Pray continue. Only speak of the play, not of the man who wrote it.

MASSA [*earnestly*]: Me speak then from heart, True Christian, please—Jesus save me, give me rest, thank God; but Jew born, Jew father, mother, Jew face have still—have always, yes? Understand, please? that I have sympathy for Jews

SHAKESPEARE: Yes, I understand what you mean.

MASSA: With Jew face, Jew much other things. So is Massa, so is Jew from Spain, from Turkey, from Africa—yes, from Malta. Please, Jew from Malta you give him bread, it taste him good—same it taste Christian man. Not give him bread, he poor hungry Jew same poor hungry Christian. Take him coat away, he cold Jew, same cold Christian. Prick him—Jew bleed, Christian bleed. With eyes same can see, with nose smell—same can laugh, can weep, can love...[*He wipes his eyes*]. You not believe me!

SHAKESPEARE [*impressed*]: Yes, I do believe you. [*Unexpectedly*] Thank you, Master Massa. You have been most obliging.

MASSA: Me poor bad head! Menda he shall tell you true. He know what all!

SHAKESPEARE: This Menda is evidently a noteworthy personage. Was he, like you, a wanderer, without means of living, before he reached this haven?

MASSA: Menda such a beggarman? Think not so! Rich man he was! Would make great business!

SHAKESPEARE: Ah, this is of interest! A pillar of the money-market, was he? A famous breeder of shekels?

MASSA [*vaguely*]: Business of merchant shipping, me think.

SHAKESPEARE [*baulked again*]: That's no use to me.

[*Abigail, a dark, graceful, well-dressed young Jewess, has entered from the left. She draws back a step, seeing a stranger. Shakespeare, observing her, starts, adding under his breath:*]

But *this*...!

MASSA [*rising*]: Pardon. It is his friend. [*Accosting Abigail*] Please you walk in mistress. You wish see Master Menda? I fetch him you quick.

ABIGAIL: Thanks.

[*Massa goes out by the garden. Abigail, conscious of Shakespeare's interest, retains complete self-composure.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*rising*]: Pray take my seat, madam.

ABIGAIL [*in clear English*]: Thank you. I prefer to stand.

SHAKESPEARE [*after some hesitation*]: Excuse a stranger's presumption——

ABIGAIL [*at once on the defensive*]: Sir?

SHAKESPEARE: I must speak. I have observed you before [*she looks at him hard*]—in company with a certain very worthy gentleman.

ABIGAIL: Indeed?

SHAKESPEARE: Also I have seen you enter this builping before.

ABIGAIL: You have followed me, you mean?

SHAKESPEARE: Not so. I am frequently in this neighbourhood—as a visitor to Southampton House.

ABIGAIL: The Earl of Southampton has many suitors, I believe.

SHAKESPEARE [*warmly*]: And I have many friends. Your Laurence for one.

ABIGAIL [*flashing*]: Laurence has spoken of me?

SHAKESPEARE: Alas, no! I saw you first many weeks ago, riding with him. All my questioning since has been completely fruitless. But I guess much.

ABIGAIL: You are curious and bold.

SHAKESPEARE: Yes, madam. For one reason, at least, which you shall admit does me no discredit.

ABIGAIL: Well?

SHAKESPEARE: I am a poet, and I intend to make you immortal in a play I am writing.

ABIGAIL [*contemptuously*]: You poets! I should feel honoured!

SHAKESPEARE: Laurence would say so. He has ever been generous in his praise.

ABIGAIL [*impressed*]: What is it you would know of me?

SHAKESPEARE: Whether I read your soul aright.

ABIGAIL: So my soul is to be appropriated!

SHAKESPEARE: Also how it comes that you speak English like a native.

ABIGAIL: There you shall be satisfied. I was born in England. Because I am dark, you think I must be a foreigner?

SHAKESPEARE: Because you are dark? No, madam. I have known other dark ladies... [*He pauses at the thought.*] But you have answered my question.

ABIGAIL: Leaving you more mystified than ever! And you dare to think you know me!

SHAKESPEARE: I think I know the core of you. I think——[*He breaks off.*] Shall I tell you what I think?

ABIGAIL: Well?

SHAKESPEARE [*pointedly*]: I think you are no Jewess at heart.

ABIGAIL [*with irony*]: And you are the understanding poet!

SHAKESPEARE: And I think you have a taste for poetry—and for music——

ABIGAIL: All that is true.

SHAKESPEARE: I was sure of it!

ABIGAIL: And now shall I reveal a secret to you—the secret of my taste for poetry?

SHAKESPEARE: Please.

ABIGAIL: Since my childhood the greatest poetry in the world has been my meat and drink.

SHAKESPEARE: The greatest? By which you mean...?

ABIGAIL: No, you cannot discern my meaning, Master play-poet.

[*At that moment Massa returns from the garden, conducting Nathaniel Menda, a scholarly and short-sighted old gentleman. Abigail turns quickly to accost him.*]

ABIGAIL [*deferentially*]: I have interrupted your studies, sir? I am too early?

MASSA [*to Shakespeare in a whisper*]: It is the Menda!

MENDA [*with a slight foreign accent*]: Too early for *me*, Abigail?

ABIGAIL [*checking him*]: There is a stranger present.

MENDA: Now I remember. MASSA did tell me. [*Peering round*] Where is this good gentleman?

SHAKESPEARE [*advancing*]: I will not intrude upon you now, sir. Perhaps of your courtesy you will appoint some convenient hour——

MASSA: Wait! I show you this time our lodgings and our chapel. We come again to him later. Is well? You follow me?

SHAKESPEARE: Very willingly, Master Massa. [*To Menda*] Then I may expect to see you anon, sir? [*With a bow*] Mistress Abigail also, I hope?

ABIGAIL (*biting her lip*): Sir—

SHAKESPEARE: Let us make a fair exchange, madam. My name is William Shakespeare.

[*Smiling, he turns to follow Massa*].

MASSA: First our garden—so beautiful!

[*They go out together. Menda and Abigail wait till their voices have fadded before embracing.*]

MENDA: And now? I was not expecting you today.

ABIGAIL: Shall we sit down? [*She leads him to a chair and settles herself beside him.*] I have come to say good-bye.

MENDA [*surprised*]: My dear! You are leaving England?

ABIGAIL: I sail for Antwerp to-morrow.

MENDA: So soon? You go on a visit to your Aunt Esther?

ABIGAIL: I shall not return to England—ever.

MENDA: Abigail!

ABIGAIL: It is settled.

MENDA: Your parets——

ABIGAIL: Are resigned to my decision.

MENDA [*with a sigh*]: There will be more than one broken heart.

ABIGAIL [*quietly*]: Mine is broken, I think.

MENDA [*after a pause*]: And the young man—Your English sea-captain?

ABIGAIL: I have parted from him.

MENDA: He has formed a new attachment?

ABIGAIL [*shaking her head*]: Laurence is not like that. He does not change. He would marry me now, next year, any time. I cannot marry him.

MENDA: 'Tis pity. A brave man, a good-hearted man, you have said.

ABIGAIL: Yes. And kind and patient and no fool.

MENDA: A good husband he would make, then.

ABIGAIL: Not for me.

MENDA: You are a difficult woman to suit?

ABIGAIL [*simply*]: I am a Jewish woman.

MENDA [*apprehensive*]: Hush, my dear.

ABIGAIL: Yes, I should have been more careful. [*She rises and makes sure that there is no one outside the door, before returning to him.*] I had forgotten that I was still in England. In Antwerp it will be different. I shall be able to speak the truth aloud.

MENDA: Did you tell your sea-captain the truth?

ABIGAIL: Yes. He was gentle, and he will keep my secret, and he has writ me such a sad, tender letter. You see, he does not understand. No one in England can understand. That man who was here when you came—he is a friend of Laurence—he could read my Jewish ancestry in my face. He marvelled that

I could speak English, and was pleased to tell me I was no Jewess at heart—a compliment, he thought it! And had I told him—as I told Laurence—that, though born in London, and christened in St. Olave's Church, and though never absent from the family pew on Sundays, I can reach God in full communion only in our private worship behind the closed curtains at home, he would have pitied me perhaps as some harmless madwoman. He would still have mocked and railed at my faith and my people among his Christian friends.

MENDA: How can you know that?

ABIGAIL: Because all Christians do so. Except one! [*She presses his hand.*]

MENDA: More true it would be to say that no Christians do so. Christians in name perhaps—but you are better Christian than they.

ABIGAIL: I can't argue with you. [*With a sob*] Oh, Uncle Judah, I am so torn within!...[*She bursts into tears, recovering under his gentle caresses.*] There, I called you "Uncle" again!

MENDA: And "Judah"—when my name is now Nathaniel!

ABIGAIL: In Antwerp life will be so much easier.

MENDA: You think so? [*He shakes his head.*] With violent passions it is never easy to live. All the time we make trouble for ourselves. To be quiet within —this is, for Jew or Christian, to be with God. Recall! Before my conversion I lived in London without concealment of my Judaism. It was inconvenient, perhaps that my wife's relations, with their family pew at St. Olave's Church, could not acknowledge a Jewish kinsman, but it was for them more worry than for me, I

think. [*She nods assent.*] I lived always at peace with my good neighbours. Perhaps it was by luck, but I think a man of any profession who can keep to himself and give no offence will not be molested in this England. Your father did think otherwise.

ABIGAIL: How we used to envy you secretly, until—until that awful day!

MENDA: When I announced myself a Christian? For that you have not quite forgiven me, even yet?

ABIGAIL: I vowed I would never, never forgive you, but now—I can see it has not changed you. And you are still my favourite uncle. [*Persuasively*]. Why not come with me to Antwerp?

MENDA: You have forgiven me, but you do not accept my conversion.

ABIGAIL: I think it suited you to make yourself a hermit's cell here.

MENDA: And that I am not a true Christian?

ABIGAIL: What is a Christian, Uncle?

MENDA: One who accepts Jesus as his master.

ABIGAIL: No. If it meant no more than that I might have followed you here. To be a Christian one must be baptized into a church, and believe this thing, and acknowledge that thing, and condemn all those who cannot believe or will not acknowledge... It was a Christian church that expelled our family from its home in Spain.

MENDA: The Church of England is different. It would give freedom.

ABIGAIL: What? Can you pretend there is freedom of conscience in England to-day?

MENDA: One day there will be. God is at work in England.

ABIGAIL: And for that day you will wait here? Oh, why must you be so obstinate?

MENDA [*sadly*]: And it is your complaint that these English strangers will never understand you! My nearest, loving kinswoman will never understand me, I fear...May be in this life no one of us may expect to be understood by another.

ABIGAIL [*earnestly*]: Yet God has given man understanding. Is that not so?

MENDA: To some few he has given a morsel, a foretaste—to his chosen ones, his prophets.

ABIGAIL: And his poets?

[*There is a sudden gleam in her eye.*]

MENDA: Yes, to all true poets.

ABIGAIL: Uncle, there is a new, wild notion stirring in my brain...[*She pauses*]. The man you saw here—the friend of Laurence—he is a poet.

MENDA: These English poets—they are as common as the weeds in our garden!

ABIGAIL: This one—if you will allow my judgment, sir—is of a different order. His writings—or such of them as Laurence has shown to me—are, in truth, incomparable for strength of feeling and richness of expression.

MENDA: Such praise from you!

ABIGAIL: Listen, Uncle dear. If I am right this visitor, this true poet, idolized by Laurence——

[*She catches her breath*].

MENDA: Well, and if you are right?

ABIGAIL: Oh, I am dizzy at the thought! It is as if one were glimpsing God's very mind!...He, William

Shakespeare, comes to you for instruction. You have the chance—Heaven-sent—to open his eye. So that he, in turn, can——

MENDA: Can reveal it to Laurence? So enabling him, with his new understanding, to keep you in England? Is that your proposal?

ABIGAIL: Oh, more than that—so infinitely much more! Not Laurence only, but all England—nay, all the world—could be made to understand!

MENDA: Through the utterance of a single poet? Truly an ambitious flight of fancy!

ABIGAIL: Nay, through something more than a poet's bare word; through the compelling art of the playhouse, in which this Shakespeare excels.

MENDA: He is a stage poet?

ABIGAIL: Ay, and in fellowship with the players. And is come here to worm out matter for a play even now in the making. Mark my word! Unless you can turn him from his purpose it will be another and crueller *Jew of Malta*.

MENDA: And you would have me persuade him to refashion it as a panegyric of our race?

ABIGAIL: Only think how is might alleviate the lot of so many victims!...

MENDA: I am thinking at this moment of the mysterious art of the drama. "Compelling" you have called it, rightly. It is a theme on which I have bestowed some study. I find that this compulsion will prevail only upon a willing subject: that the dramatist, to be successful, must ever attune his mind to the humours of his audience.

ABIGAIL: You mean, that an English audience—where Jews are concerned——

MENDA: Every Englishman believes in his heart that the Jew Roderigo Lopez was rightly hanged for attempting to murder his queen.

ABIGAIL: Poor blundering Roderigo—tool of villains!

MENDA: Has your William Shakespeare the power to eradicate the lie of his guilt? If not, I fear me there will be no quarter shown to our race by the play-goers of this generation.

ABIGAIL: Yes, I can see that now. It was a vain, foolish dream, born of despair!

MENDA: Rather of divine impatience. [*He shakes his head.*] God's kingdom is not to be hastened. Yet who is Nathaniel Menda to interpret that divine will which knows not limitation! At least I can attempt the impossible. Come, I will do what I can, then, to enlighten this poetic genius—if only for Master Laurence's sake!

ABIGAIL: He would be no whit more grateful than I, believe me.

MENDA: Nay, but I would be doing myself as good a turn. I have no small stake in the enterprise. I do not much relish the thought of letting my best friend go...

ABIGAIL [*with emotion*]: I shall miss you too, Uncle. [*He pats her hand.*] Hush! Voices!

[*A moment later Shakespeare and Massa re-enter from the garden.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*who is in high spirits*]: Jessica! Jessica! I like the sound of that.

MASSA: Jessica not, master—Jiscah.

SHAKESPEARE: Jessica for me! Has the word a significance, I wonder?

MASSA: Master Menda, he tell you well.

SHAKESPEARE [*discreetly, as he catches Abigail's eye*]: But Master Menda is still engaged, I perceive.

MENDA [*genially*]: It is the gentleman that has come to learn from us! [*He rises.*] Be pleased, sir, to command my poor services, here and now. This lady will retire, if you wish.

SHAKESPEARE: If *I* wish! Nothing could be further from my wishes. I do assure you, sir.

MENDA: And what is it you would have me to impart? But first sit at your ease, I beg.

SHAKESPEARE: Thank you. [*He accepts the proffered chair. Menda resumes his seat beside Abigail.*] Now, sir, to be brief, I have, with the aid of our worthy Signor Massa, discovered a most euphonious Hebrew name for a lady——

MASSA: Me aid? No, please! Once did show him our great Bible——

SHAKESPEARE: It was an inspiration! On opening this handsome volume—at the book of Genesis, was it not?—[*Massa beams assent*] we lighted by good fortune upon a veritable cornucopia of names, in the form of a genealogy. Among these names was my Jessica, disguised as Iska or Jiscah——

MENDA [*readily*]: The daughter of Haran, sister of Lot. It is the eleventh chapter of Genesis.

SHAKESPEARE: I perceive that your reputation for learning is well founded, sir. And now you can tell me, no doubt, if this word, apart from its nominal function, has any particular connotation in the Hebrew language?

MENDA [*not so readily*]: Jiscah—let me think...It might be said of one who looks out——

SHAKESPEARE : One who looks out. This must be fitted ! One who looks out....I have it already ! Did she not look out of her casement window to gaze upon the young men passing by ? What more is wanted ?

MASSA [*delighted*] : 'Tis good ? What I tell you ? Menda he know everything ! [*Suddenly turning away*] Wait ! I mind me a something...

[*He slips into the garden.*]

MENDA [*after a pause*] : You are composing a comedy it seems, Master Shakespeare ?

SHAKESPEARE : A kind of comedy, sir—the Shakespearean kind, if I may so call it.

MENDA: Treating of this Jessica ?

SHAKESPEARE [*smiling at Abigail*] : A charming young lady, loved to distraction by a very estimable young gentleman—Lorenzo by name.

MENDA [*evenly*] : And this Lorenzo—this estimable young gentleman—he is to win the lady's favour ?

SHAKESPEARE : And her hand to boot, sir. He is to be made the happiest of mortals !

MENDA : Then there will be a blessing on their union ?

SHAKESPEARE : Ay, to be sure, sir ! Their maker's blessing ! [*He is still smiling at Abigail.*]

MENDA (*gravely*). : Their maker had a Maker, sir, and for a purpose which we cannot fathom. He has made perfect love between the sexes—I mean a perfect marriage—difficult of achievement.

SHAKESPEARE : (*affecting the same tone*) : Very true, sir.

MENDA : This Jessica, if I understand you, is to be a daughter of Israel ?

SHAKESPEARE: Daughter of an Israelitish father would be more correct.

MENDA: And of an Israelitish mother?

SHAKESPEARE: With four Israelitish grandparents, inferentially, if it please you.

MENDA: You catch my drift, I see. Lorenzo, then must have some tenderness for the despised race?

SHAKESPEARE: I don't follow you there, sir. He is to wed with Jessica, not with her race.

MENDA: But are not there two hearts to beat in unison?

SHAKESPEARE: Most ardently!

MENDA: Hers would in any case feel compassion for her own people?

SHAKESPEARE: Nay, sir, that would make shipwreck of my poor comedy!

MENDA: Would you, then, have us find mirth in the spectacle of an unnatural daughter?

SHAKESPEARE: Unnatural? Are Nature's ways so straitly bounded, sir?

MENDA: With great deference, sir, our Heavenly Father has set bounds—has implanted his love for mankind to flow through Nature's courses.

SHAKESPEARE [*bored*]: Your pardon, Master Menda. Of Love or Nature—or even Art—I will discourse with my man, but theology is a matter I leave to others. Perchance when I have reached your years I shall have more stomach for it.

MENDA [*looking keenly at him*]: Perchance sooner. Who knows?

SHAKESPEARE: Meanwhile will you not descend to my level?

MENDA : We will talk of anything you please, sir.

SHAKESPEARE (*lightly changing the subject*) : Then, sir, I will make further trial of your vocabulary—— (*Observing the other's disappointment*) Nay, sir, there was no unkindness meant.

MENDA : I do believe you, Master Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE : Then in token of forgiveness, will you give me of your bounty some rich, resounding Hebrew word signifying an animal of prey—not such a frightening animal—not a tiger, nor a vulture—a shark, perhaps—yet not so puissant—but with something fishlike, sly, calculating—a fish-devouring fowl, a cormorant, mayhap..

(*Abigail with growing unease has started to her feet.*)

MENDA (*tranquil*) : There is in our Old Testament a word for such a creature. (*He pauses.*)

SHAKESPEARE : Yes ?

MENDA : The word is Sholoch.

SHAKESPEARE (*testing it*) : Sholoch—Sharloch—*Shylock*...I like that : Shylock. It is settled. Thank you both, gentlemen (*bowing in turn to the garden and Menda*), our absent friend for Jessica, and you for Shylock.

ABIGAIL (*horror in her voice*) : *What* is settled, may I ask ? it is to be a man's name—Shylock, the cormorant ?

SHAKESPEARE : Yes, Shylock shall be a man—true humankind. Trust me for that !...Is the thought so disagreeable to you, madam ?

ABIGAIL : Yes. Yes. (*Impulsively turning to him*). Oh, please—please spare us !

SHAKESPEARE : Why, you are weeping ! Nay, fear nothing. If I have seemed to be mocking you 'twas

but in play. As I love Laurence, I do assure you I am Jessica's true friend ?

ABIGAIL : Do you mean *my* friend ?

SHAKESPEARE : Why, of course, madam.

ABIGAIL : Then, for my sake [*she kneels before him*] I implore you ! Do not write this play !

SHAKESPEARE [*outraged*] : What ? Madam are you mad ? Why, the play is half writ already ! Would you have me commit murder ? Come, this is unseemly ! Nay, seriously [*he takes her hand, raises her to her feet*] I think you would be depriving the world of——

MENDA [*intervening*] : Of another *Jew of Malta*, sir ? That is her fear—and mine ! It was an unchristian play.

SHAKESPEARE : You would not accuse me of plagiarism, I hope, sir ? [*To Abigail*] Madam, I solemnly promise you that my Jessica shall bear no resemblance to any person in another play.

ABIGAIL [*drawing herself up*] : Nor to any peron in life, *I* promise.

SHAKESPEARE : That is a challenge ! [*She turns from him.*] I will meet it with an invitation. When the last line of my play has been composed I will ask you to honour me by attending a rehearsal at our playhouse.

ABIGAIL : I shall not be in England, sir.

SHAKESPEARE : From your tone I might conclude that the threat from my Muse was driving you from these shores !

ABIGAIL : You may construe my words as you will.

MENDA : Can we be of no further service, sir ?

SHAKESPEARE: Thank you, but I think I have all I want from you. And I fear I have taken too much of your time. [*He bows.*] I will remember, and, I hope, do justice to my preceptors.

MENDA: Justice? Nay, sir, as we are all sinners we dare not ask for justice. We ask for mercy.

SHAKESPEARE: A most striking sentiment! That too I must remember.

[*Massa returns from the garden with a small basket*].

MASSA [*presenting his basket to Shakespeare*]: Please you, sir. From our garden.

SHAKESPEARE [*looking into the basket*]: Mulberries! What a charming gift! I must taste one now. [*He does so.*] Delicious! This is most gracious of you, signor. But now, while I remember—I promised to pay my respects to your Warden. [*To Massa*] You will perhaps direct me to his office?

MASSA: Please to follow. I bring you straight.

SHAKESPEARE: Thank you all for a most profitable afternoon. [*Bowing*] Farewell, madam. [*To Menda*] And you, sir.

ABIGAIL: *Can* that man be a great poet?

MENDA: Very likely. Understanding in such cases may ripen slowly. And suffering will do much for him.

ABIGAIL [*bitterly*]: God is at work in England, you said.

MENDA: Yes, and through such a man, it may well be. When he shall have drunk deep of the cup....

ABIGAIL: Why must men suffer? ?

She means to say that Menda has

MENDA: From suffering comes truest understanding. It has been God's way from the beginning.

ABIGAIL: But what good has all our suffering brought?

MENDA: It has brought Christianity, for one thing—the true Christianity. But the process is not completed yet. We were not bidden to feel at home in this world.

ABIGAIL: I shall hope to feel athome in Antwerp, none the less.

[*But her voice is none too confident.*]

MENDA: Shall we walk a little in the garden before you go?

[*She takes his arm, and they are walking into the sunshine as the curtain falls.*]

but how can she believe when even the best English poet cannot understand the Jew's truly

NOTES

NOTES

THE TREE

The play conveys a deep idea very subtly. To reach its beautiful meaning the reader has to give quiet thought to its symbolism. The idea behind the characters and their fates is summarized in the existence of the single tree. The single tree represents the spiritual unity that is achieved by two people who sincerely love each other. Through this feeling of oneness they can each fulfil themselves. Without the ability to give love and understanding to one another, there is no individual peace and happiness. Those like Vera and Leopold who live selfishly for their own personal interests always feel an emptiness in their lives. They are forever struggling to achieve happiness from a worldly point of view, and that is why they never get it. Vera is engrossed in her own dreams of becoming an actress. She resents her sister Anna's presence, because since she has to stay with her, she cannot get out into the smart life of a town, to achieve the fame she imagines is awaiting her. Leopold cares for no human creature. Nothing but making higher and higher profits matters to him. No morals rule his business calculations.

Vera and Leopold, both crave for a life of love and affection. They try to love one another but both of them are far too self centered to make allowances for one another. To Leopold Vera only represents a business investment, who has cost him a certain amount of money. He hopes to get some returns from her, but is angered when Vera makes her own demands upon his time. She is egotistical and wants Leopold to sit admiringly while she does her play reading. Vera is incapable of making sacrifices for another, and when Leopold thoughtless of Vera's feelings, goes off to settle his business without saying " good-bye " to her personally, she is so peeved and angry that she goes to the length of cruelty and meanly deceiving Anna.

Anna and Ernest are in complete contrast to Vera and Leopold. They both can give love and so are able to receive it. Their temperaments are quiet and natural. They are unhurried, gentle, considerate and hence fulfilled human beings. They realize fully the necessity of human sacrifice and companionship and make and give both. Life has no meaning for either of them, when the loved one is lost. Hence both of them commit suicide when they think they are separated from each other.

The Tree in the garden is the symbol of human unity. Vera and Anna's parents planted two trees, one tree each for either of the girls, but one of the trees died. The one remaining points to the moral that to unite and make oneself one with another through love and sacrifice is the good and complete life. Vera's and Leopold's domineering temperaments not only give

them no happiness, but they also lead to the death of two good people, Anna and Ernest.

The Gardener's role is similar to that of the Chorus in Greek tragedy. In Greek tragedy, the Chorus represents a body of objective onlookers, who pass statements about the behaviour of those concerned in the enacting of the tragedy. The Gardener sits near his flower-beds, or enters at the appropriate times to pass some casual remark—which though ostensibly disconnected from the dialogue—happens to be a pertinent comment on the situation.

Here are some examples which illustrate the idea.

Gardener.—The Cuckoo sings louder than any of the other birds—and yet he is the only one that does not build a nest.

These lines imply that those who strive and struggle for their own selfish ends, making a great clamour about their wishes and achievements are the ones who never get the fulfilment of a home and love.

Gardener.—"When man was turned out of the garden, he was turned out because he sinned. And it was because he sinned that the first weeds came," says he. So I says, "Ah, but I don't see why I should be bothered with weeds just because *Adam* sinned, says I."

Here the Gardener's words, point indirectly to the life and the end of Anna and Ernest. Both of them have to suffer because of the selfishness of Vera and Leopold, and in the end both of them have to die because of these two "sinners."

Gardener...."To much of anything is apt to be bad for us", says he.

This means that too much trust in happiness is wrong. Just before these words of the Gardener, Anna and Ernest are in a very happy mood together, and Ernest has just said : "All things are possible—on a summer's night." The words can also point towards Vera and Leopold for too much self-love leads to Evil.

"*Thou know'st and the mask of night is on my face,...*" Romeo and Juliet, Act II Sc : ii. The famous "balcony scene" here Romeo and Juliet first reveal their love for one another and pledge their troth. It is one of the most romantic scenes in European drama. It is used as dramatic irony by the play-wright of the Tree, to heighten Leopold's prosaic attitude to love by contrasting it with the ardent love of Romeo and Juliet.

"I have no joy of this contract to-night "...cf *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II Sc. ii.

THEY CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

This is a symbolic play and we have to make a little effort to discover the meaning that it indirectly conveys.

The play largely symbolizes the mind of the Girl, who represents many a struggling young actress. She is haunted by the drama and the stage and in her mind beat the voices of great actors delivering well known lines from famous plays. She has an un-shakable confidence in her own capacity as an actress, but she has met with no success so far either due to a real lack of talent or because of bad luck.

There are real and unreal characters in the play. The real ones are those who actually exist in flesh and blood. The Girl, the Doorman, the Actress, the Producer, the Actor and the Electrician. The unreal ones are those who exist only in the Girl's imagination. Each one of the unreal characters or only their voices represent some facet of the Girl's troubled mind. Due to her unsatisfied longings as an actress the atmosphere and life of the stage appear glamorous and beautiful to the Girl. The stage is a magic carpet for her, it can transport her to the most heroic, the most tragically beautiful or jubilantly happy experiences of which man is capable.

The dramatist Alex Atkinson has contrasted the Girl's ideas about theatrical life, with some aspects of its reality, by introducing the real characters. The Doorman represents the boredom, the dullness and the ignominy those attached to the stage as underlings have to bear. Through him, we see the life of the stage as nothing but professional routine.

The little scene of the beginnings of a rehearsal is typical of the monotony and unwillingness to rehearse that all actors feel. No one arrives on time, and the harassed producer spends his energy in useless vitipurations. His life is like that of all producers, composed of bossing around and of being bossed by the spoilt and vain leading lady. The Actor we get the impression is good-looking, blase and most probably not too intelligent. The Electrician although real is represented appropriately only as a voice, because to the actors he is of no consequence; only a fellow to be bullied

and shouted at. His function is important though, because without the lights there can be no play in a theatre.

The last sentence of the play, spoken by the Actress contains the dramatist's main idea. She shivers with an uncanny feeling of foreboding or a haunting memory of the past, as she like the poor Girl says, "How *quiet* it is here." After the Actress has seen the Girl unceremoniously and cruelly turned away from the stage, she is either looking into her own future when she shall be old and forgotten and the stage will haunt her too, or she is reminded of her own early days, as a struggling young actress. In either case the effect is humbling, and the playwright thus represents for us the glory as well as the heart break of the theatre.

THE DISTANT DRUM

This is a play whose main idea is made to hinge upon a supernatural belief, which is used as dramatic irony by the writer to show how those irreverent of the spiritual and of moral values are in the end defeated because of their own high-stepping pride. Olive Siddall is a selfish gold-digger who has manoevered Alan Sarne into a marriage of convenience with her. She plans to marry Alan only for his money and to continue to be disloyal to him with her present lover Michael Kenley. Alan is sincerely in love with Olive and sees nothing but good in her. His mother, Lady Sarne however has assessed Olive accurately and dislikes her intensely.

Unfortunately for Olive just on the day of her first visit to Sarne House, Alan's younger brother Ronnie, an airman, is suspected to have had an accident. Lady Sarne is full of grim foreboding, and at any moment expects to hear the traditional family herald of death—the Drum sound, Olive hates Lady Sarne because she senses that the latter has seen through her treachery, and in a typically calculating and petty manner, decides to revenge herself upon her future mother-in-law by playing a trick on her. She coaxes Kenley to go and strike the Drum secretly, so giving Lady Sarne a cruel shock. She would now be sure that Ronnie had died because she believed strongly in the story of the Drum.

Olive Siddall is one fated for a fall, for she is suffering from the Greek sin of *hubris* or pride. The moral idea that "Pride cometh before a fall" is one that has dominated the theatre from ancient Greek times. The whole idea of dramatic irony is based on it. Just when a particular character is strutting confidently around, secure in his overweening pride, fate strikes him low, by the very weapon with which he had planned to over-throw another. But unknown to her, Olive Siddall had been seen and heard by her fiance Alan while she was having her amorous interlude with Kenley. Alan is so shocked and disappointed in her that he goes and commits suicide. It is then that the supernatural Drum really sounds. Olive gleefully thinks that it is Kenley doing her bidding. But as the Drum continues to strike, she begins to feel a little irritated with Kenley because in his absence Lord Sarne has come and inform-

ed her that a telephone message has come from Ronnie, saying that he is safe. Suddenly Kenley bursts into the room, nearly fainting with fright, but the Drum still goes on sounding. He blubbers that he has just seen Alan lying dead, having shot himself. Now are all Olive Siddall's schemes, crashing around her, and the writer leaves us to imagine her chagrin and rage.

Philip Johnson has achieved an atmosphere of eerie gloom and suspense most successfully in this modern play. We are not inclined to believe in ghosts and prophesies now-a-days, but a feeling of fear, before some dark mystery grips one right from the commencement of this play.

Hard boiled—Sophisticated, worldly.

Armoury—Place where arms of war are kept.

Monte—Fashionable abbreviation for Monte Carlo, a smart summer resort on the French Riviera.

Corniche—The road from Monte Carlo to Nice.

AND SO TO WAR

This is a satirical comedy on modern politics all over the world. The effect is near the regions of the fantastic, because the playwright has introduced into *one* imaginary country Disneyana, all the main types of government operating separately in different countries to-day. It is a satire on the vicious circle modern politics has got into, which leads nations from one world war to another. There seems to be no adequate solution for ending this state of affairs, and the one the author offers us is rather idealistic and fantastic. Fanacci's dramatic declaration.—" *Therefore I decree*

that no man under fifty shall bear arms" is omething like the appearance of a god as though from heaven (in ancient Greek drama) just at the opportune moment to unravel an insoluble human problem.

Each of the characters of the play should be taken with a pinch of salt, because they are exaggerated and slightly caricatured to clearly represent the writer's satirical point of view, about politicians.

Although dealing with a serious and difficult subject —the avoidance of war—Corrie injects a grimly comic atmosphere into his play. This is achieved through his clever manipulation of satiric irony. The main idea of the play is represented not so much through action as through dialogue. The appeal is intellectual rather than that of straight forward entertainment. The dialogue is fraught with a subtle irony which lends it an interesting piquancy. Meredith has said that there are two types of comedy, the intellectual type which tittilates the mind into activity and the comedy which tickles the ribs, or appeals to the farcical in human nature. The play, *And so to War* belongs to the first category.

Lilliput.—An imaginary kingdom in Swift's satire, *Gulliver's Travels.*

Barefaced.—Insolent.

Ask me another.—Colloquial way of saying "I am unable to answer your question."

Travelling.—Here it means working with a specific purpose in view.

By gum.—Slang for, By heavens or my goodness and so on.

Nipper.—Slang for a baby.

Give me the pip.—Slang for, "You sicken me."

And never gee his blinking ginger.—Slang for,—"And never feel awkward or embarrassed."

THE DEAR DEPARTED

Innumerable are the literary satires, proverbs and anecdotes illustrating the hypocrisy of the " weeping heirs" of a man of substance who is on his death-bed, or who has recently passed on. The play, *The Dear Departed* is based on the theme of the mercenary mindedness of man's relatives, with one brilliant difference. The dead man in this case comes back to life again and we are allowed to witness the discomfiture of the so-called bereaved family. The joke is against these hypocritical relatives and the " dead " man comes off best of all.

The Dear Departed is satire against the cheap sentiments of lower middle class families who try to ape the noble emotions but are essentially avaricious and heartless. This veneer of aristocratic behaviour is what Stanley Houghton satirizes most skilfully and consciously; for their fault lies in not only being avaricious but hypocritical as well. All through the history of satire the vice of hypocrisy has ever been most hateful to satirists.

The two sisters Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Jordan appear at first to be different. Mrs. Jordan seeming to be more refined and genuine than her robust domineering sister,

Mrs. Slater. That is a false impression and Mrs. Jordan comes out in her true colours, soon after her appearance on the stage. The two husbands, Henry Slater and Ben Jordan are despicable examples of manhood. They are permanently under the thumbs of their wives and supply very good examples of the hen-pecked husband. The two women have played upon whatever weakness there was in their husband's characters for petty monetary gains, and have gradually made them lose all sense of honour and decency. One of the most characteristic and despicable incidents occurs when Mrs. Slater forces her husband Henry to get into the "dead" man's slippers.

The child, Victoria is a convincing and hateful characterization of the precocious child. Having been brought up in an atmosphere of deceit and cunning, she has developed these qualities firmly by the time she has attained the age of ten. She sees through her parents manouverings to capture the goods of grandfather Merryweather before the Jordan family arrives. She is a singularly unlovable child because already she has no love for anybody but herself. This again reflects upon the atmosphere provided for her at home.

The two families are busy vying with one another over their respective appropriateness of mourning apparel and their superior rights over the old man's property when a surprizing climax occurs. The "deceased" walks in hale and hearty after a good sleep induced by having drunk too much. He knows his two daughters well and understands the situation quick enough. He chuckles secretly over their discomfiture and leads

them into deeper confusion by pretending to be deaf and conveniently mis-understanding their explanations.

The two wicked sisters who frequently remind one of Regan and Goneril in Shakespeare's *King Lear* though crushed with disappointment at the old man's resurruction now make a last desperate attempt to get him to live in their particular households, hoping to win his favour thereby and to get the lion's share in his will.

One more dramatic surprise awaits us however. Old Abel Merryweather announces his impending marriage to old Mrs. John Shorrocks a worthy widow, who keeps the pub across the road, and to which Merryweather has been a constant visitor in the past. He takes especial care to let his dear relatives know that all his property and his life insurance money will go to his wife after his death. The play thus ends with the wicked being justly punished in an original and comic manner.

VILLA FOR SALE

This play is a comedy by a French writer, and has consequently a sharp bite and exquisite flavour in its comic situations. The play has three separate plots, all rather mildly connected with one another. The first part is a comic situation directed against the mistress of the Villa, Juliette. In this the Maid has the laugh against her mistress, and the last word in. The old economic and social systems of the bourgeoisie are falling, and the commoner is stepping into positions

of greater financial security. Juliette is being forced to sell her Villa owing to monetary difficulties, her servant knows this, and flaunts her capacity to earn a neat sum through the films, which Juliette dare not do, because of the superior pretensions of her class.

The second part deals with Gaston, Jeanne and Juliette, a fairly newly-wed middle-class couple. Gaston has some business acumen, which somewhat ungallantly he turns to account at the expense of his young wife. He has walked into Juliette's *salon* just to humour her whim about the purchase of a villa. The price quoted by Juliette is two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Gaston feels that this amount is far too much for his purse. The sale is still unsettled when the eager Jeanne goes to examine the bathroom with Juliette.

Now we enter upon the third part of the play. Gaston meets that inimitable character-sketch of an American-in-France, Mrs. Al-Smith. She is rich, confident, always moving around at full-speed, buying up as much as she can in Europe with her dollars. She mistakes Gaston for the husband of the lady who owns the villa. The quick-witted Gaston takes advantage of this situation, and quotes three hundred thousand francs as his price. He pockets Mrs. Al-Smith's cheque and goes in to purchase the villa for himself. from Juliette for two hundred and fifty thousand francs. He achieves a profit of fifty thousand francs, purely out of a fortuitous situation, that springs up unexpectedly with the arrival of Mrs. Al-Smith.

We must not look for any deep meaning in this play. It relies for its entertainment on a quick-witted and lively dialogue and on its comic situations. The characterization is not deep and complex in its searchings of human nature, but it is sure and light in its touch, conveying a brief clear impression of the different personalities.

The Maid is the typical, cheeky young servant, with a rather disarming sense of humour. Juliette her mistress is a fairly sound business woman, as the majority of French women are. She is seen struggling to maintain an aristocratic distance between herself and her servant. Gaston is a shrewd opportunist, he deceives all three women successfully. From Juliette he gets a Corot painting free because he has got three hundred thousand francs from Mrs. Al-Smith, and can so afford Juliette's demand of two hundred and fifty thousand francs. His wife is cheated of her dreams of living in a villa, because this charming rascal would rather make some money than pamper her whims. Jeanne is young, and a little selfish. She has evidently led a secure life with Mama and Papa, and has not much imagination for financial matters.

More of a sell than a sale......*i.e.*, more of a loss than a sale with a profit.

You betcha......This is an Americanism, meaning, you can lay any bet.

———

MONEYS FROM SHYLOCK

This play tries to give the other side of the picture, to the prevailing attitude towards Jews in Shakespeare's England. The main idea is expressed through Abigail, who is meant to be the original from whom Shakespeare fashioned his Jessica for his play, *The Merchant of Venice.*

The play opens with a visit by Shakespeare to the Domus conversarum—or Home of Converts in the hope of finding a female Jewish Convert, whom he can copy for his characterization of Jessica. In *The Merchant of Venice,* Jessica is Shylock, the notorious Jew's daughter who is in love with a Christian, Lorenzo, and who elopes with him and has a Christian marriage, at the same time taking all her father's. precious money. Rubinstein's attitude towards shakespeare himself at this period of his life is somewhat patronizing. Shakespeare like the rest of his Elizabethan audience had a superior contempt for the Jews and frankly believed that if a Jewish woman was converted to Christianity, she would be a true Christian in the deepest recesses of her soul. Abigail whom he chooses to make the prototype of such a Jessica is in fact quite the contrary to Shakespeare's fond imaginings of her. Although a convert she has never forgotten her Hebrew faith.

Old Menda who is much wiser than Shakespeare at this stage, although nominally a convert, still believes in a Jewish regeneration, and speaks with true foresight when he says that he believes that England will be the country where Jewish toleration will first begin.

He also prophesies the greatness of Shakespeare, although Shakespeare at the age of thirty is shown by the dramatist as a genius-without the ripeness of wisdom.

In the end Abigail gives up her lover Laurence because he is a Christian and goes to Antwerp where she can have religious freedom. So unlike what Shakespeare's Jessica did.

THE END